LOTUS OF BAHAPUR

SHERIAR NOOREYEZDAN

BAHÁ'Í HOUSE OF WORSHIP
NEW DELHI
INDIA

Photo

Dedicated to my precious brother Rustom, (Rusi), who toiled alone in Bombay, operating our family business to finance and enable me to render voluntary service to the Temple throughout the seven-year construction period and subsequent three years of its management.
To beloved Rusi I am eternally indebted.

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I am indebted to the National Spritually of the Bahá'ís of India for affording me the priceless opportunity to serve on the Temple construction team, estate management and subsequently for their kind permission to record my memoirs in this publication.

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ……
Preface ……
Introduction ……
Spiritual Significance of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár …
Bahá'í Character ……
Abode of Baha ……
Lilly of The Great Waters……
Lotus Unveiled ……
Saga of Sacrifice……
Laying Foundation Stone…… ….. .
Vying for Honours. ……
The Divine Hand ……
Water …… ……
Electricity .. ……
Steel .. ……
Grey Cement …. ……
Grey Stone Aggregate .. ……
White Stone Aggregate ……
White Sand ……
White Cement ……
Marble … ……
Silicone Sealant ……
Site Mobilization……
Sowing the Seed ……
Sanctioned Plans ……
Lotus Takes Root … .. ……
First Column ……
Mock-Ups ……
Lotus Blooms ……
Podium ……
Change of Guard ……

Ancillary Building .....
Arches ....
Petals .....
Labour Relations.....
Lock-out of Site .....
Resumption of work .....
Lotus Bud .....
In Full Bloom..... .....
Marble Cladding.....
Pools
Ancillary Works
Flooring and Paving .....
Services Block.....
Shoe Room .....
Walkways.....
Interiors .....
Archives Room .....
Accoustics .....
Electrification .....
Completion of Construction.....
Landscaping .....
Dedication
Preparations .....
Ceremony at Temple .....
Conference at Indira Gandhi Stadium ..
Lotus Beckons ....
Security ....
Visitings Crowds .....
Spell of the Temple
Foreign Students
Dawn Prayers
Sacred Spot .....
Efarsons
Temple Logo .....
Lotus in Bhutan .....
Lotus in Europe .....
Lotus Offshoot - Varqa .....
Missing Donation Box
Memorable Events .....
First Prayer Meeting.....
Zero Degree Arch .....
Muhajir Gate .....
Its Finished .....
Festivals .....
Swords & Ploughshares .....
Tashi Delek .....
First Head of State Visit.....
Prominent Bahá'í Visitors .....
Roses .....
Rúhiyyih Khánum's Vision of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár ....
O Lotus - Rúhiyyih Khánum 1
Forever in Bloom - Thomas Shoemaker
Akbar's Dream - Alfred Lord Tennyson...
Site Organization .....
Visitor's Comments.....

O people of creation!
It is incumbent upon you to build, in the cities and in the name of the Lord of Revelation, Houses as perfect as can be built on earth, and to adorn them with that which beseemeth them, not with images and statues. Magnify ye then therein the praise of your merciful Lord in a spirit of joy and radiance. Lo! It is through His mention that hearts are illumined and eyes solaced.

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Bahá'u'lláh

"O people of the world! Build ye houses of worship throughout the lands in the Name of Him Who is the Lord of all religions. Make them as perfect as is possible in the world of being, and adorn them with that which befitteth them, not with images and effigies. Then, with radiance and joy, celebrate therein the praise of your Lord, the Most Compassionate. Verily, by His remembrance the eye is cheered and the heart is filled with light." - Bahá'u'lláh

PREFACE

Glowing in ethereal beauty, shimmering like a diamond, a magnificent white lotus looms large over the South Delhi horizon. Popularly called *kamal mandir* - Lotus Temple - this edifice is the Bahá'í House of Worship, the

Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, the Dawning Place of the Worship of God. This writer was blessed with the bounty of assisting in raising this iconic edifice.

On the eve of my departure in November 1978 to visit Bahá'í centres in Burma and Thailand, Bahá'í Counsellor, Mrs. Zena Sorabjee paid me a surprise visit. She conveyed the good news that construction of the Temple in Delhi was soon to start, and stated that an Indian Bahá'í was needed to assist the architect, Mr. Fariburz Sahba. She asked if I would accept that responsibility. My natural response was that Mr. Sahba needed a Bahá'í architect, engineer, or person with construction experience. I had neither the requisite technical qualifications nor experience. Mrs. Sorabjee stated that Mr. Sahba, needed a persevering, trustworthy Bahá'í of proven integrity and dedication. And that all things considered by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India, the choice had fallen upon me. This was a surprise and an honour. I needed time to give the proposal serious thought and discuss with my family, because it would mean my transferring to Delhi, leaving my family in Bombay. I would also have to burden my younger brother with total responsibility of running our family business on which I depended for financial support. I prayed for guidance.

In Burma, the first Bahá'í home I visited in Rangoon, an artist of Buddhist origin had painted a mural showing the Shrine of the Bab surrounded by Bahá'í Houses of Worship. Surprisingly the lotus design of the Indian House of Worship, not yet widely known, was beautifully depicted. The artist spoke animatedly about the design and significance of the lotus. Was this a road-sign to Delhi?

In the highland villages of northern Thailand, the humblest of homes had photographs or small statues of Lord Buddha sitting in meditation on lotus pedestals, before which incense sticks wafted their fragrance, or symbolic food offerings were placed. These constant reminders of the Temple Project prompted me to heed the call of the National Spiritual Assembly. I volunteered my service for the projected three-year construction period, which extended to seven years. And post construction, I managed the Temple estate for three years, completing a decade of soul-satisfying service.

It was indeed a rare privilege to witness, and a bounty to assist the growth of the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of India. As the seven-year construction period was an adventure, replete with excitement and frustration, with joy and anguish, so was the three-year post-construction period one of exultation and rejoicing, of awe and wonder, as this magnificent edifice silently beckoned to its portals millions of souls. During this decade of intimate association with this divine institution of Bahá'u'lláh, I had many unusual and wonderful experiences, which were shared occasionally with friends and at Bahá'í gatherings. So touched were Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís alike, that I was repeatedly urged to record those moving and mystic experiences for the benefit of readers everywhere. This pen-portrayal of events is the result.

The sole purpose of these narrations is to underscore that assurances of

help and support offered in the Holy Writings are not mere encouraging words. The Holy Concourse is for real, and their assistance a certainty. Bahá'u'lláh, Founder of the Bahá'í Faith has confirmed this assurance saying "*We have assigned to every end a means for its accomplishment; avail yourselves thereof, and place your trust and confidence in God, the Omniscient, the All-Wise".*
The described events demonstrate that perseverance, dedication, and total reliance upon God could achieve unimagined victories. Many important lessons were learnt during this eventful and soul-satisfying decade. I often turned to the Holy Writings to uplift my spirit and flagging faith, recalling the words of Abdu'l-Bahá, son of Bahá'u'lláh and Centre of His Covenant -"*As your faith, so shall your powers and your blessings be".* My credo therefore came to be that no earthly power could hinder the construction of an edifice being raised for the glorification of the Creator of the universe. And happily, our rich Indian spiritual heritage assured us the co-operation and assistance of officials of all statutary bodies. It also meant that with firm faith and perseverance, God's Holy Concourse would help overcome every obstacle. Inflexible faith enabled us to legally secure from Government and other authorities, all that was in the best interests of the Project. Alone, in my one-man department, I always felt an inexplicable presence, a supportive hand on my shoulder, giving me the confidence to represent the Bahá'í Faith, and the Temple Project before the highest authorities. This amazed me most. It was never me, but a mysterious power that used me. I was a mere pawn, a lowly tool. To this I testify, not out of modesty or humility, but in all honesty and sincerity.

Bahá'í history is the account of victories won by dedicated, selfless and sacrificial endeavour, unmindful of personal strengths and weaknesses. None has failed who has surrendered himself as a willing tool into the Hand of Providence. With all the fervour of my soul I pray that sharing of my experiences will reinforce the faith of readers, and convince all of the invincibility of the power of God.

Eternally indebted am I for the bounty of association with this potent Institution of the Cause of God, which in the words of the august Universal House of Justice, the highest administrative institution of the Bahá'í Faith, "*…will profoundly influence the spiritual destiny of the people of India and of the waiting multitudes beyond its borders*."

Sheriar

Nooreyezdan

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INTRODUCTION

The Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh, envisioned Houses of Worship in all cities, towns and villages across the world as focal points of community spiritual and social life. To date eight Houses of Worship have been erected on all continents. India is honoured by the Universal House of Justice in being named the first country in the world to have a second House

of Worship, proposed to be built in Bihar. Other such edifices are planned to be erected in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Papua New Guinea, Cambodia, Colombia, Kenya and Vanuatu (South Pacific Islands). These Houses of Worship stand out as beacons, calling the world to a new, inclusive, harmonious mode of religious worship and community life.

The first House of Worship was erected in 1908 in the Central Asian city of Ashkabad, Turkestan. The Ashkabad House of Worship was unique in as much as, in addition to serving as a spiritual center for the thriving Bahá'í community of the region, it also met the humnitarian and social needs by providing medical and educational facilities, and a hospice for travellers. The Ashkabad House of Worship was appropriated by the Soviet Government in 1938. The building was damaged during a severe earthquake in 1948, and was demolished in 1962.

The first House of Worship in the West was completed in 1953, in Wilmette, Illinois, U.S.A., on the shores of Lake Michigan, north of Chicago. Its distinguishing features are the intricate filigree dome and extraordinary ornamentation, combining architectural styles of the East and West. Other continental Houses of Worship are built in Frankfurt – Germany, Kampala – Uganda, Panama City – Panama, Sydney -, Australia, Apia - Western Samoa, and Santiago - Chile.

Across the globe more than 120 sites are acquired for future Houses of Worship. Ultimately, every local Bahá'í community will have its own House of Worship, which will become the focus of community life, and center for social, educational, scientific and humanitarian services.

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SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MASHRIQU'L-ADHKÁR

Shoghi Effendi

It should be borne in mind that the central edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, round which in the fullness of time shall cluster such institutions of social service as shall afford relief to the suffering, sustenance to the poor, shelter to the wayfarer, solace to the bereaved, and education to the ignorant, should be regarded apart from these dependencies, as a house solely designed and entirely dedicated to the worship of God in accordance with the few, yet definitely prescribed principles established by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitab-i-Aqdas. It should not be inferred, however, from this general statement that the interior of the central edifice itself will be converted into a conglomeration of religious services conducted along lines associated with the traditional procedure obtaining in churches, mosques, synagogues, and other temples of worship. Its various avenues of approach, converging towards the central hall beneath its dome, will not serve as admittance to those sectarian adherents of rigid formulae and man-made creeds, each bent, according to his way, to observe his rites, recite his prayers, perform his ablutions, and display the particular symbols of his faith within separately defined sections of Bahá'u'lláh's Universal House of Worship. Far from the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár offering such a spectacle of incoherent and

confused sectarian observances and rites, a condition wholly incompatible with the provisions of the Aqdas and irreconcilable with the spirit it inculcates, the central House of Bahá'í Worship, enshrined within the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár , will gather within its chastened walls, in a serenely spiritual atmosphere, only those who, discarding forever the trappings of elaborate and ostentatious ceremony, are willing worshippers of the one true God, as manifested in this age by the Person of Bahá'u'lláh. To them will the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár symbolize the fundamental verity underlying the Bahá'í Faith, that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is not final but progressive. Theirs will be the conviction that an all-loving and ever-watchful Father, Who in the past, and at various stages in the evolution of mankind, has sent forth His Prophets as the Bearers of His Message, and the Manifestations of His Light to mankind, cannot at this critical period of their civilization withhold from His children the guidance which they sorely need amid the darkness which has beset them, and which neither the light of science nor that of human intellect and wisdom can succeed in dissipating. And thus having recognized in Bahá'u'lláh the source whence this celestial light proceeds, they will irresistibly feel attracted to seek the shelter of His house, and congregate therein, unhampered by ceremonials and unfettered by creed, to render homage to the one true God, the Essence and Orb of eternal Truth, and to exalt and magnify the names of His Messengers and Prophets Who, from time immemorial even unto our day, have, under divers circumstances and in varying measure, mirrored forth to a dark and wayward world the light of heavenly guidance.

But however inspiring the conception of Bahá'í worship, as witnessed in the central edifice of this exalted Temple, it cannot be regarded as the sole, nor even the essential, factor in the part of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, as designed by Bahá'u'lláh, is destined to play in the organic life of the Bahá'í community. Divorced from the social, humanitarian, educational and scientific pursuits centering around the dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, Bahá'í worship, however exalted in its conception, however passionate in fervor, can never hope to achieve beyond the meager and often transitory results produced by the contemplations of the ascetic or communion of the passive worshipper. It cannot afford lasting satisfaction and benefit to the worshipper himself, mush less to humanity in general, unless and until translated and transfused into that dynamic and disinterested service to the cause of humanity, which it is the supreme privilege of the dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár to facilitate and promote. Nor will the exertions, no matter how disinterested and strenuous, of those who within the precincts of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár will be engaged in administering the affairs of the future Bahá'í commonwealth, fructify and prosper unless they are brought close and into daily communion with those spiritual agencies centering and radiating from the central shrine of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. Nothing short of direct and constant interaction between the spiritual forces emanating from this House of Worship centering in the heart of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, and the energies consciously displayed by those who administer its affairs in their service to humanity can possibly provide the necessary agency capable of removing the ills that have so long and so grievously afflicted mankind. For it is

assuredly upon the consciousness of the efficacy of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh , reinforced on one hand by spiritual communion with His Spirit, and on the other by the intelligent application and the faithful execution of the principles and laws He revealed, that the salvation of a world in travail must ultimately depend. And of all the institutions that stand associated with His Holy Name, surely none save the institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár can most adequately provide the essentials of Bahá'í worship and service, both so vital to the regeneration of the world. Therein lies the secret of the loftiness, of the potency, of the unique position of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár as one of the outstanding institutions conceived by Bahá'u'lláh.

(25th Oct.1929 - Bahá'í World 1950-54)

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(Quotations to be used as page-fillers wherever needed)

Some material things have spiritual effect, and the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is a material thing that will have great effect upon the spirits of the people. – Abdu'l-Bahá

The real Temple is the very Law of God, for to that all humanity must resort, and that is the centre of unity for all mankind. That is the collective centre, that is the cause of accord and unity of the hearts. That is the cause of the solidarity of the human race. That is the source of life eternal. - Abdu'l-Bahá

Temples are the symbols of the divine uniting force …. This is the spiritual foundation, for that reason it is the most important of all foundations. From that spiritual foundation will come forth all manner of advancement and progress in the world of humanity…. Not only does the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár have an effect upon those who build it, but upon the whole world.

- Abdu'l-Bahá

"Blessed is he who directeth his steps towards the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár at the hour of dawn, communing with Him, attuned to His remembrance, imploring His forgiveness. And having entered therein, let him sit in silence to hearken unto the verses of God, the Sovereign, the Almighty, the All-Praised. Say, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is in truth any House raised in towns or villages for mention of Me. Thus hath it been named before His Throne; would that ye know it."

- Bahá'u'lláh

O Lord! Send down Thy benediction upon whomsoever serveth this edifice and exerteth himself to raise it among the peoples and religions of the world, and confirm him in every good that profiteth mankind; open the doors of riches and wealth before him, and grant him the treasures of the Kingdom which perish not; make him the sign of Thy bountiful favours

among the people, and send forth Thy aid from the sea of generosity and mercy, surging with the waves of Thy grace and bestowals.
Verily, Thou art the Generous, the Merciful, the All-Bountiful! -
Abdu'l-Bahá

O God! O God! Verily I implore Thee with a throbbing heart and streaming tears to aid everyone who endeavoureth for the erection of this edifice, in the building of a House, wherein Thy Name is mentioned.
– Abdu'l-Bahá

When the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár , with its accessories (dependencies) is established in the world, aside from its religious or spiritual influence, it will have a tremendous influence upon civilization. Aside from religionists who will feel its influence, materialists will not be exempt therefrom.
- Abdu'l-Bahá

Whatever hath been constructed for the worship of the one true God, such as mosques, chapels and temples, must not be used for any purpose other than the commemoration of His Name. This is an ordinance of God, and he who violateth it is verily of those who have transgressed.

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Bahá'u'lláh

Temples are the symbols of that uniting force in order that when people gather there, in a given edifice of God, they may recall the fact that the law has been revealed for them, and that the law is to unite them.
- Abdu'l-Bahá

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is the most important matter, and the greatest divine institute. Consider how the first institute of His Holiness Moses, after His exodus from Egypt, was the "Tent of Martyrdom" which He raised and which was the travelling Temple. It was a tent which they pitched in the desert, wherever they abode, and worshipped in it. Likewise, after His Holiness Christ – may the spirit of the world be a sacrifice to Him! – the first institute by the disciples was a Temple. They planned a church in every country. Consider the Gospel and the importance of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár will become evident. - Abdu'l-Bahá

The edifice of the House of Worship hath a powerful influence on every phase of life.

- Abdu'l-Bahá

Although to outward seeming the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is a material structure, yet it hath a spiritual effect. It forgeth bonds of unity from heart to heart; it is a collective centre for men's souls.
- Abdu'l-Bahá

This is a Bahá'í Temple, a supreme House of Worship, a place of spiritual gathering, and of the manifestation of divine mysteries.
- Abdu'l-Bahá

Prayer is essentially a communion between man and God, and as such transcends all ritualistic forms and formulae.
- Shoghi Effendi

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BAHÁ'Í CHARACTER

Shoghi Effendi

The thought that is uppermost in our hearts is the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár - the Bahá'í Temple. To that thought let us add the building of Bahá'í character. Without the strength of the one, the other can never be fully realised in all its beauty. The architect's plan for this beautiful edifice is clearly and perfectly defined. There is symmetry and harmony in every line, and by following the plan accurately we know what we are producing. How about ourselves? What kind of character are we producing? What are we trying to produce? Evidently this is our task as a religious movement, as a religious agency. For are we not the agents and disciples of Bahá'u'lláh? As such we are called upon to serve many purposes, but the building of Bahá'í character is fundamental to them all.

The fact is that Bahá'í character is a perfectly definite type. The plan has been given by Bahá'u'lláh. While it does not reduce all persons to the level of lifeless sameness, its outstanding works, its dominating spirit are the same for all. Do we know as much about the spiritual plan for the building of Bahá'í character as we do about the architectural plan of our Mashriqu'l-Adhkár? Do we know enough about this character because of the way we are living to be able to reproduce it? This is our first great business. The completion of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár will naturally follow. We must think this question through until we have an answer as clear and definite as the architectural plan. We must think this question through until we have an answer as personal and definite as the individual who is to be influenced by what we are doing as followers of the Bahá'í Faith.

We are all aware that nothing but the power of the Holy Spirit is able to create Bahá'í character so necessary to meet the test of the days that lie ahead. A few years back the followers of Bahá'u'lláh supplicated the Master to grant them the privilege of building a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in America. We all know the answer and are familiar with the many Tablets in which Abdu'l-Bahá pointed out the blessings and benefits that would accrue to all mankind when it was completed. But He also pointed out that during the interim, great sacrifice had to be made and ceaseless effort exercised to attain the standard set before us. As we read and meditate over the Tablets and the Words of Bahá'u'lláh, the standard set before us is the building of a living Temple to our God. In passing, might we not say that our temptation has been to depend too much on the beautiful promises to secure results, and too often fail utterly to hold ourselves sternly to the requirement that brings about the result that is reached only by untiring effort.

In the dome of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár there is to be a beacon light that will illuminate the country for many miles around. In the heart of Bahá'í

character Bahá'u'lláh has placed a light that is far more permeating. When we move about in this light we become the real soldiers of light fighting against the forces of darkness. Our Supreme Commander is Bahá'u'lláh. From the heights of glory He is directing us. To the degree of our attraction and exultation will the searchlight of truth penetrate our being, and little by little the darkness of self will vanish. Self is effaced, every longing, every ideal, every plan that is not loved by God is given up completely to the Will of God.

Bahá'í character means the willingness to sacrifice everything and submit ourselves entirely to expressions of real obedience to Bahá'u'lláh and absolute readiness to follow through and perform whatever we are called upon to do in the Cause of God.

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ABODE OF BAHA

Bahá'ís of India, fired by their zeal to fulfill the injunction of Bahá'u'lláh to build Houses of Worship, petitioned Abdu'l-Bahá in 1920 for permission to raise a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár . Abdu'l-Bahá's gracious reply was "*by the will of God, a majestic Mashriqu'l-Adhkár will be erected in one of the central cities of India in the future."* The vision and aspirations, cherished in the hearts of that generation of Bahá'ís, was handed down and nurtured in the hearts of succeeding generations. And the first step in its realization was the acquisition of land for the future House of Worship, as one of the goals of the Ten Year Plan launched by Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith in 1953. In his Ridvan (April) 1953 message to the annual Bahá'í convention, his telegraphic message read "*Purchase land New Delhi anticipaion first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár India".* In his momentous message to the Intercontinental Conference held in New Delhi in October 1953, Shoghi Effendi urged "*The various Bahá'í Communities dwelling within the borders of this Continent, …to undertake, in the course of the coming decade … the purchase of the land for the future construction of three Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs, one in the city of Baghdad, enshrining the Most Great House, the third holiest city of the Bahá'í World, one in New Delhi, leading city of the Indian sub-continent, and the third in Sydney, the oldest and foremost of Bahá'í centres in the Antipodes."* The importance and urgency of acquiring land for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár was underscored by the Guardian's telegram of 4th May 1954: "*Urge new Assembly unitedly, determinedly, arise expedite purchase Temple land."*

In May 1954 the then National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í s of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon appointed a six-member Committee, comprising Mr. Mohamed Hayat, Mr. Mehdi Samimi, Mr. K. D. Chowdhari, Mr. Isfandiar Bakhtiari, Mr. Khodadad Hakimian and Prof. Pritam Singh, to locate suitable land. The Committee considered several proposals and held negotiations with owners. All details were forwarded to Shoghi Effendi and the following advice was received on 22nd July 1954.

Dear Bahá'í Co-workers,

Your loving letter of May 28th giving the details concerning the land which you propose to purchase for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár near New Delhi has been presented to our beloved Guardian, together with the maps which you later sent, showing its location.

The beloved Guardian approves the purchase of the particular piece of land which you have in mind. He feels there is no longer any necessity for you to send in any further reports concerning the matter, but that you should proceed with its purchase at the earliest possible moment. In other words, the next report which he receives from you concerning this important matter, he hopes will convey the good news that the land has been purchased.

He sends you his loving greetings, and assures you of his prayers in your behalf.

Faithfully yours,
Leroy Ioas,
Asstt.Secretary

With the approval of Shoghi Effendi, five contiguous plots, measuring approximately 91,000 sq.m, were purchased and registered in the name of the National Spiritual Assembly. When revenue officials visited the site to demarcate and officially hand over the plots, it came to be known from their old cloth-backed map, that the estate was part of an ancient township called Bahapur, in the 14th century Sultanate of Delhi. Current official records still mark the area as Bahapur. This was indeed an auspicious augury in raising the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of India. What might appear a coincidence, was for Bahá'ís a clear indication that this land was destined to become the footstool of God, the abode of Baha. Interestingly, Bahapur is mentioned in Rihala, the travelogue of the Moroccan adventurer Ibn Battuta, who travelled to Delhi in 1326 A.D. during the reign of Moghul emperor Muhammad-bin-Tughlak.

The Temple estate was a barren, rocky area, situated in the South-East of New Delhi, the highest point of a hillock, presenting a panoramic view of the city. The area was denuded of trees, and all topsoil had been washed away over the years, leaving exposed rock surfaces. The estate was a wilderness, totally undeveloped, the only building in the neighbourhood being the famous Hindu Kalkaji Temple. The only approach to the estate was from Mathura Road, east of Okhla railway station. That meant protracted waits at the railway crossing when trains were passing. Across the railway track a winding, narrow beaten track led up the hill to the site, bounded by a low brick wall. A prominent masonry plaque read "Site for Bahá'í House of Worship". My first visit to the Temple land was in 1955 in the company of Mr. Hushmand Fatheazam, Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly. The barrenness of the land, and its distance from any habitation provided not a hint that this spot would one day become the focal point of a spiritual park in the capital city of a vast sub-continent, with easy access by road and monorail.

In November 1959 the government enacted a law whereby all vacant land within the city would be acquired from private owners, albeit with monetary compensation, and used or re-allocated for public purposes in accordance with new development plans. Land for religious endowments was excluded from the purview of the Acquisition Act. The Temple land, registered in the name of the National Spiritual Assembly, ear-marked for a religious purpose, and falling in the legally exempted category, was none the less, acquired and taken possession of by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) in February 1967. Representations proving of no avail, the National Spiritual Assembly filed a writ petition in the Delhi High Court in April 1968. To move the courts in a private litigation is a protracted and expensive exercise, rendered doubly difficult when the respondent is the Government. In 1976 the court ruled in favour of the National Spiritual Assembly, but the Government refused to restore the land, and chose to appeal against the verdict. And then Providence stepped in. The Government was voted out of power in a mid-term confidence vote in parliament! The new Government notified de-acquisition of the land in February 1978 and restored it to the National Spiritual Assembly.

Advising and assisting the National Spiritual Assembly through the labyrinthine legal procedures, until re-possession of the land, were two legal luminaries, Mr. Jehangir Gagrat of the reputed firm of Bombay Solicitors, M/s Gagrat & Co., and Senior Advocate of the Supreme Court of India, Mr Soli Sorabjee. Their services were free and they worked tirelessly, with exemplary zeal and diligence.

It is noteworthy that the area of Bahapur within a kilometer radius around the Bahá'í Temple is being developed into the spiritual hub of Delhi. Directly to the south of the Temple, within a distance of about two hundred metres stands Kalkaji Temple, dedicated to the *Kalki Avatar,* God's Manifestation awaited by Hindus. To the South-West within four hundred metres has risen the Prachin Bhairav Temple. Between Kalkaji and Bhairav Temples is the Hindu cremation ground, with it's own small Temple. To the North at a distance also of about two hundred metres, stands the little known Shiv Kailasheshwar Temple. And to the North-West has risen the popular ISKCON Temple. In appreciation of this development, the Government changed the zonal development plan for the large tract of approximately three square kilometers surrounding the Bahá'í Temple. Originally marked for commercial development, the area has been converted into a Spiritual Park - *Aastha Kunj.*

Here again, the hand of Providence is seen at work. Whereas commercial buildings, with consequent pollution and noise, would have sprouted immediately behind the Lotus Temple, destroying the peaceful ambience and beauty of the area, now its peace and serenity will be enhanced with the development of the *Aastha Kunj*, whose foundation stone was laid by Indian Prime Minister Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee. At its foundation-stone laying ceremony the Prime Minister praised the Bahá'ís and appreciated the role of the Bahá'í Temple in promoting communal harmony. Development of the Spiritual Park commenced in May 2003 with the removal of the squatter colony that had grown in the park area. It is not difficult to visualize the

Bahá'í Temple becoming the spiritual heart of Delhi, and of the Indian sub-continent in the near future.

Was the Temple estate destined to become the spiritual hub of Delhi? Was it a blessed spot? One person believed so. He was the concreting foreman of the Temple building Contractor. This humble, pious and conscientious person was usually the first to arrive at site each morning. After formal greetings, one morning, he remarked, "Sir, your Temple land is very holy." I asked why he thought so. He explained he had noticed a cobra snake covering almost the same route from the nearby Shiv Temple, across our estate. And as a good Hindu he placed a small vial of milk along that path for the snake. Sure enough, to his great pleasure, the cobra lapped up the milk. Some Hindus believe places frequented by cobras to be sacred.

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LILY OF THE GREAT WATERS

"Art is the grandchild of God", wrote Dante. Hence the application of art, in its various forms, for the glorification of God. The most awe-inspiring architecture and sculpture, the most stirring music, prose, poetry and art, are the works and creations of God-intoxicated artists, artisans, composers and writers. Since time immemorial, the greatest talent has been dedicated to the raising of magnificent edifices for the worship of the Creator of the Universe. Monumental edifices of past ages, imposing cathedrals of medieval Europe and ornately sculpted ancient temples of the East, bear eloquent testimony that the fervour of faith has been the primary motivator of these works. Each divine revelation has released fresh energies and talents, leaving in its wake a renaissance, a civilization to inspire succeeding generations.

Designing of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, a Bahá'í House of Worship, is a spiritual undertaking, an effort to clothe religious aspiration in material garb, an endeavour to symbolize divinity, an attempt to harmonise the sentiments of different peoples and races, an enterprise to establish the footstool of God on earth. It is an adventure in creativity that calls for more than architectural ingenuity. The renowned French-Canadian architect of the first Bahá'í Temple in the West, in Wilmette, Chicago, Louis Bourgeois, commenting upon his own highly praised design, has succinctly recorded: *"Its inception was not from man, for, as musicians, artists, poets, receive their inspiration from another realm, so the Temple's architect, through all his years of labour, was ever conscious that Bahá'u'lláh was the creator of this building to be erected to His glory*." To this bears witness Prof. Luigi Quaglino, Professor of Architecture, Turin, Italy, while viewing the Wilmette Temple model in 1921: *"This is a new creation. It is a revelation from another world."*

Bahá'u'lláh has enjoined upon His followers: *"O Concourse of Creation! O People of God! Construct ye Houses in the most beautiful fashion possible, in every city, in every land, in the Name of the Lord of religions ...."* Instructions of Abdu'l-Bahá, son of Bahá'u'lláh, to American Bahá'í s

engaged in raising the Mother Temple of the West, was the brief description of the first Bahá'í Temple in Russian Turkestan. *"It has nine avenues, nine gardens, nine fountains ,.... It is like a beautiful bouquet. Just imagine an edifice of that beauty in the centre, very lofty, surrounded by gardens, variegated flowers,.. that is the way it should be... matchless ... most beautiful".* And from the stream of guidance of Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, to National Spiritual Assemblies and individuals involved in the design and construction of different Houses of Worship, it becomes clear that great emphasis is laid upon the elegance and dignity of the building. General design parameters apart, the architect needs to take into account the religious and cultural background of the people of the land, their sensitivities and aspirations. Ideally, therefore, the design of the House of Worship must be distinctive and refreshingly different from established forms of religious architecture. And though dissimilar to age-old designs of buildings of communal worship, it should relate to all religious dispensations, so as to attract all peoples and exclude none. In the multi-religious society of India, where religious sentiments are sharp, and communities divided and polarized, this aspect assumed great importance. The House of Worship needed to be of a universally acceptable design.

The honour of designing the first Indian Mashriqu'l-Adhkár was bestowed by the Universal of Justice in 1976 upon Mr. Fariburz Sahba, a brilliant young Bahá'í architect who shot into prominence while associating with another outstanding Bahá'í architect, Mr. Husayn Amanat, in designing Tehran's famous Shahyad monument, as head of the Design Department of Amanat Associates & Architects. Mr. Sahba's major works included the elegant buildings of the Pahlavi Foundation, the Iranian Embassy building in Beijing, and faculties of Aryameher University. With that outstanding repertoire, Mr. Sahba was appointed Associate Architect, with Mr. Husayn Amanat, in the most prestigious project of the Bahá'í world, the designing of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice, the supreme administrative institution of the Bahá'í world.

Mr. Sahba confided he realized that sitting at his drawing board in Tehran, however prayerfully, would not provide the necessary inspiration to design a building that could relate to India's multi-religious culture. So he undertook a journey through India, to view famous religious buildings, to better understand and appreciate the religious beliefs and practices of Indians; to imbibe their rich cultural heritage. He travelled through India with an open but sharply tuned mind, visiting and studying the architecture of buildings of religious and historical significance, and more importantly meeting with ordinary people to feel their religious pulse. Mr. Sahba admitted he was awed by the wide spectrum and rich and varied culture of India.

At that time the sub-continent of India comprised twenty-six states, with different languages, cultures, religious beliefs and practices, and each state was larger in area and more densely populated than many European countries. Hinduism, including Jainism and Sikhism, had by far the largest number of adherents, followed by Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and a minuscule Jewish community. And to make the

scenario more complex, the main religious communities were divided into numerous sects, castes and sub-castes, making it that much more difficult, to conceive a design that would be universally acceptable to the billion people of this ancient land. Mr. Sahba often recalled the experiences of his journey through India. *"This journey",* he said, *"provided me with a fresh insight into the boundless horizons of Indian culture. My esteem and respect for India soared. I also realized the difficulty of the task of producing a design, a concept that should transcend every regional, linguistic, caste and cultural barrier, in order to attract the hearts of all the colourful and pure-hearted people of India. But destiny took me to a place where a pure soul, whom I had never met before, was waiting to tell me about the lotus."* That place was the city of Gwalior in Central India, and the pure soul was Mr. Kamruddin Bartar, an art teacher in a local school.

Mr. Bartar, an active member of the Bahá'í community of Gwalior, was born in 1938 to a poor Muslim family. Young Kamruddin excelled in art throughout his school career, and helped supplement the family income by painting sign-boards for shops and advertisement billboards. It was in this capacity that he first heard of the Bahá'í Faith in 1955. Mr. Boman Mehrabani, a pioneer from Bombay, wanted a good sign-board painted with some Bahá'í Holy Writings for the Bahá'í Centre. In seventeen-year-old Kamruddin he found a good painter, whose charges too were very reasonable. Painting the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh was Kamruddin's introduction to the Bahá'í Faith. His heart was touched. He eagerly studied available books and had long discussions with Mr. Mehrabani. The following year brought the stalwart Mr. Mehfuzu'l-Haq Ilmi from Pakistan. That scholar of Islam and the Bahá'í Faith, removed the last doubts from Kamruddin's mind and led him to the threshold of Bahá'u'lláh. Kamruddin's new-found Faith burst forth in poetry and song, paintings and publications. Many are the stirring songs he wrote and rendered in his deep, melodious voice. His book, Agrjyoti, on the life of Qurratu'l-Ayn (Tahirih), renowned poetess of Iran, was published in two editions by the Bahá'í Publishing Trust of India. He was the honorary editor of Abha, the national Hindi Bahá'í magazine for two decades.

Mr. Bartar first heard mention of the Temple at a Bahá'í meeting in 1974. He recalled: *"I returned home in a contemplative mood. Sleep escaped me that night. All I could think of was the Temple. Suddenly the artist in me responded. The lotus is India's national flower; the lotus is the symbol of spirituality. The shape of the Bahá'í Temple should be nothing other than the lotus."* Many months later Mr. Bartar learned of the visit to Gwalior of architect Mr. Sahba. He recalled again. *"I was deeply stirred. I sketched my concept of the lotus Temple that same night. The next day I reached the Olyai residence with my sketches and presented them to Mr. Sahba. With my very poor English I explained my concept to Mr. Sahba as he viewed my sketches. The Temple should be lotus-shaped, with opened and opening petals. The nine open petals should cover nine entrances. Between entrances there should be pools with lotus flowers and fountains. Passages should enable people to walk between the pools and around the building. Seeing the drawings, with my explanations in broken English, Mr. Sahba was so pleased that he embraced me."*

Mr.Sahba confided he had serious reservations, because no designer had simulated nature in architecture. He ruled out the lotus concept. But the idea haunted him. He admitted: *"The image of the lotus seemed to grow in my awareness however much I tried to resist the idea. Wherever I went - to ancient Hindu temples or Buddhist caves - among all the carvings and symbols, the lotus flower seemed to stand out and capture my eye. I shared the idea with a friend who had wide experience and knowledge of the cultures and religions of India. He listened to me with shining eyes and growing excitement. Together we set out in search of a growing lotus plant. We found a single blossom in a small pond. On that day I resolved to justify the lotus as a concept for the Temple. From then on, with each passing day, I became more strongly convinced that this was the only solution."*

The Encyclopedia of Symbols describes the lotus as "an almost universal symbol, ... the flower that was in the beginning, ... the glorious lily of the Great Waters." Padma, Kamal, Arvind, Pamposh, Rajiv, are some of the Indian names by which the lotus is widely known. So great is its importance and significance in Indian culture, that Indian art and literature would be impoverished without reference to, or use of this exquisite motif. Indeed Hindu mythology and Buddhist folk-lore would have to be re-written if the lotus was to be omitted from their ambit. Brahma, the Lord of Creation, one of the triad of Hindu Gods with Shiva and Vishnu, is believed to have been born of the lotus that grew out of the navel of Lord Vishnu. Hence the epithet "Lotus-born" given to Brahma. Hindu scriptures depict the lotus variously as the heart or womb, symbolising divinity and creation. Buddhists believe the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshwara rose out of a lotus. Hence their prayer and popular refrain "*Om mani padme hum - O Ye Jewel in the Lotus.*" The lotus motif is very much in evidence in the stone carvings at Bodh Gaya, Sanchi, and the cave paintings of Ajanta and Ellora.

Apart from the fact of the lotus being the national flower of India, and of its association with Hinduism and Buddhism, the symbolism of the lotus is thought-provoking. The lotus grows in stagnant pools, its roots deep in muddy waters, its flower always above the polluted water surface, exquisitely beautiful, clean and undefiled. The lotus symbolizes spiritual awakening and enlightenment because its petals open to greet the sun each morning and close at sunset. With this concept our Temple could not send out a stronger, more inspiring message to all mankind - though born on earth and surrounded by materialism, remain detached and undefiled. This has been at the heart of all religious teachings through the centuries - to walk the material path with spiritual feet.

The concept decision taken, Mr. Sahba put together his design team, headed by his Associate Architect Mr. Mashiyat Ashraf, and set up office in London, so that the architectural team could work in tandem with the structural engineer’s team of the reputed firm of Flint & Neil Partnership. Dr. Flint was associated with the Bahá’í community since several decades, having designed the structures of the Panama and Samoa Temples. Out of three years of path breaking design work, emerged the plans that would translate into the first successful replication of nature in concrete - a lotus

blossom.

The design, replete with ingenious and unprecedented features, could be the subject of a technical dissertation. And the unusual procedures and materials devised for its construction could take pride of place in the annals of construction history. Every design detail was subjected to stringent scrutiny. Scale models of the building were made to study its complicated geometry, and subjected to wind-tunnel tests, similar to tests carried out on aeroplane fuselage prototypes. The innovative natural ventilation system was tested by injecting coloured smoke into a transparent perspex model and filmed to study air circulation. To ensure complete safety of the building meteorological data of the worst seismic movements, the heaviest rainfall, the severest storms, highest and lowest temperatures of the past century were factored into the design. The Temple model is accorded a place of honour in the museum of the Imperial College of Science, London, where all the sophisticated and stringent tests were carried out.

Word of the unique design spreading through the professional fraternity in England, raised eyebrows. Mr. Sahba was cautioned that, with the sophisticated construction technology in Europe, it would be extremely difficult to build such a structure. In India it would be impossible. Apprehensions voiced were in the context of the serious problems encountered in the construction of the Sydney Opera House, whose shell structure, though similar in appearance, was easier to build because its sections were pre-cast at ground level and raised into position. The Temple shell structure was to be cast-in-place, jointless concrete.

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LOTUS UNVEILED

The Temple model was taken by Mr. Sahba to Haifa, Israel, to display before the Universal House of Justice and Hand of the Cause of God, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum. Of that occasion she recalled: "*When I was invited by the Universal House of Justice to go and see this design, frankly I said, O Lord have mercy on me. What is it going to be like? Because being an architect's daughter, I know what a difficult problem it is to design a circular nine-sided building. But when I saw this beautiful model, I was deeply impressed and I thought that it would be a wonderful thing and very, very much loved in India.*" She explained why. *"The lotus has not only an association with Buddhism and Hinduism, but the lotus, par excellence, is the symbol of the Manifestation of God. The lotus is probably the most perfect flower in the whole world. It is symmetrical, it is exquisitely beautiful. And how does it grow? It grows in a swamp, it comes out of mud, and it raises its head out of the slime, absolutely clean and perfect. Now, that is what the Manifestation of God is in the world. He comes out of the slime of this planet. He comes from the worst place in the planet. He appears among the worst people on the planet, so that nobody can say that we made Him. They say only God can bring forth such a being from such an environment. This is perhaps the greatest symbolism of the lotus, and I think that it is so beautiful that we, who are the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, should have this design in this part of the world where it is so deeply*

associated with two of the world's great religions - Buddhism and Hinduism."

The design, simple enough to be described in a few sentences, took three years to crystallize and another six years to translate into reality. It visualised two conjoined structures - main and ancillary buildings. The main building comprised the superstructure and basement surrounded by nine pools of water. The circular inner basement was to function as a huge air reservoir, from which cool air could be pumped into the auditorium above, during the hot summer seasons. The outer basement area was to house installations and equipment, and also provide walkways around the lower level pools. The superstructure consisted of three sets of nine petals set out radially. The outermost or completely opened petals, formed canopies over the entrances. The medial set, representing semi-open petals, formed huge skylights to allow direct sunlight into the auditorium. The innermost or just-opening petals formed the massive dome over the central auditorium. In the plans these were described as entrance, outer, and inner leaves, EL, OL, and IL. Within the inner leaves was the interior dome, ID, a lattice of nine thin intersecting hemispherical concrete shells, representing the lotus bud.

The layout of the ancillary building availed of the topography of the land and was so landscaped as to be almost completely underground. Comprising two symmetrical halves, the building did not appear to be of any significant size, although it housed a library, conference hall, administrative offices, a two bedroom apartment for a resident caretaker, pantry, staff facilities, etc. spread over 900 square metres. The main and ancillary buildings were linked by the main entrance steps, and bridges joining the outer podium. A gently sloping ramp provided convenient access to the prayer hall to the physically handicapped in wheel-chairs.

The height of the main building from the entrance steps was about 43 metres, and of the interior dome from the auditorium floor, about 30 metres. The external diameter of the building across the pools was approximately 120 metres, while the diameter across the entrance leaves measured about 70 metres The central circular auditorium with a diameter of 36 metres was designed to seat 2000 persons in the inner podium, and 1000 in the triangular outer leaves areas. The metre-deep pools, each 464 sq.m. in area had water storage capacity of about 4,600 cu.m.

The building was deliberately located at the Western end of the estate, to enable visitors and worshippers approaching the Temple over the quarter-kilometer walkway to exit from the material world, and be better prepared for the uplifting spiritual experience ahead.

The completed Temple building achieved world recognition with prestigious international awards for its architectural, structural and illumination designs. The citation of the award by the Institution of Structural Engineers, London, reads: *"That an Institution special award be made to the Flint & Neill Partnership in connection with their work on the Bahá'í House of Worship, New Delhi, for the realisation of the architect's concept which went through the design with only slight changes, producing a building so*

emulating the beauty of a flower and so striking in its visual impact." Additionally, the American Concrete Institute awarded it a special "Excellence in Concrete" award.

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SAGA OF SACRIFICE

Behind every milestone in Bahá'í history, every achievement, every victory, is the poignant story of perseverance and sacrifice. It has been, and always will be, the privilege of Bahá'ís to finance their community projects. Public donations are never solicited, nor accepted. Hence meeting the challenge of big-budget projects by relatively small communities is welcomed by Bahá'í s as a test of their faith. No one is too poor to contribute his or her mite, and no sacrifice is too great in achieving any financial target. Raising the Mother Temple of the Indian Sub-continent was no exception to this general practice. The story of fund-raising for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár makes for a saga of sacrifice and devotion, commencing with purchase of the land in 1954, and concluding with completion of the building in 1986.

The three spiritual giants who spearheaded the fund-raising, and whose names will eternally be linked with the first Indian Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, were a humble Iranian tea-shop owner, an African prisoner and a Hawaiian jeweller. The amount needed for purchase of the estate was Rs.140,000/-, an astronomical sum at that time to be raised by the small number of Bahá'ís of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon. The National Spiritual Assembly set regional fund-raising targets, and their representatives travelled to different cities to encourage Bahá'ís to raise the amount.

Mr. Abbas Aly Butt and Mr. Isfandiar Bakhtiari, Secretary and Treasurer respectively of the National Spiritual Assembly, travelled to Karachi, met with the Local Spiritual Assembly, apprised them of their fund-raising mission, and stated Pakistan's expected share was Rs.15,000/-. One Assembly member, Mr. Mehraban Jamshidi, recalled that Mr.Ardeshir Rostampur, a Bahá'í resident of Hyderabad (Sind), had once expressed his desire to build a hall in Karachi, in memory of his late father, for use of the community at Feasts and gatherings. Mr.Jamshidi had opined that such an investment at that time was not advisable, and comforted Mr. Rostampur with the assurance that since he had such a selfless desire, God would provide the proper opportunity. Mr. Jamshidi considered the opportunity had now presented itself. He suggested the entire Assembly accompany Mr. Bakhtiari and Mr. Butt to Hyderabad to meet Mr. Rostampur. They reached Hyderabad the same day by the first train. A pleasant surprise awaited them at Mr. Rostampur's modest restaurant.

A native of the village of Kuchebyog in Yazd, central Iran, young Ardeshir Rostampur, had left home at the tender age of ten years, with little besides the blessings of his widowed, deaf and mute mother, to seek his fortune in distant India. His earthly possessions were the clothes he wore, some pieces of home-made dry bread, and a few rials, about $1. He partly trekked and partly hitched a ride to the port, and worked for his sea passage to Bombay. Young Ardeshir found work in the restaurant of one of the many

Iranian Zoroastrians. The restaurant was where he worked from dawn until mid-night, and also where he lay his weary body. Although paid a pittance, Ardeshir used the opportunity to learn the trade, nursing the impossible ambition of owning and running his own restaurant some day. Against that he saved everything he could, after sending small sums for his mother. After several years of hard labour and frugal living in Bombay he set out to fulfil his dream. With the paltry sum saved, he travelled to Karachi, where he worked in the restaurant of another Iranian Zoroastrian named Ardeshir Khairabadi. Recognizing the zeal and determination of his young and ambitious employee, and fearing that he would start a restaurant in competition to his own, Khairabadi suggested that Rostampur shift to Hyderabad, where there were no Iranian restaurants yet. Burning ambition brought Ardeshir to Hyderabad at the ripe age of twenty-three years. He rented modest premises in a building owned by a Parsi gentleman, near some army barracks, the ground floor of which would serve as his restaurant, and two rooms on the upper floor, for his residence.

Alone and unaided, Ardeshir established his restaurant and it was not long before it became popular as the only Iranian restaurant in town. He named it Britannia Restaurant. With the involvement of the sub-continent in World War II, and the movement of British troops through Hyderabad, Ardeshir's restaurant flourished. He served the best fish'n'chips in town. Stories of his honesty, strict discipline and prowess spread through Hyderabad. One that captured the imagination and admiration of all was of the occasion when some inebriated soldiers, entered his restaurant at closing time and demanded they be served dinner. Having been served, and seeing the owner was all alone, they attempted to leave without paying. Ardeshir pulled the doors shut to prevent their exit and released the errant soldiers after recovering his dues. With that story spreading through the town, Britannia Restaurant became famous.

The Bahá’í pioneer to Hyderabad who befriended Mr. Rostampur and gave him the message of Bahá’u’lláh was Mr. Shahriar Yazdani. Other notable visiting Bahá’í teachers to whom Mr. Rostampur extended his spontaneous hospitality were the itinerant Miss Martha Root and Prof. Pritam Singh. In time, all Bahá’í travellers became his personal guests, whom he served with such warm hospitality, that it was generally felt that Mr. Rostampur was a Bahá’í. Mrs. Ruhangiz Jamshidi, daughter of Mr. Shahriar Yazdani, recalled the occasion, when as a young girl visiting Ardeshir with her father, a very disturbed Mr. Rostampur wept his dear heart out over her father's shoulder, mumbling repeatedly, *"I am ashamed of myself, Shahriar. Now what should I do?"* That was the moment of realisation and recognition. He was ashamed that it had taken him so long to recognize Bahá’u’lláh. He was already living a Bahá’í life, and had indeed been taken for a Bahá’í, long before his formal declaration. Having been guided to the Threshold of the Abha Beauty at the age of 45 years, Ardeshir Rostampur became so enamoured that he determined he would live the rest of his life for the Cause, to work and earn for the Faith. He is reported to have declared *"Whatever I earn is for Bahá’u’lláh ."* He remained steadfast and zealously served the Sacred Threshold with the same ardour and determination that had led him from rags to modest wealth and respect. Before he accepted the Faith he kept

sending money for his mother in Iran, and also for the welfare of the destitute and downtrodden Zoroastrians of his native village. Now, being a bachelor and no family to support, he lived, worked and earned for the Cause of God.

Mr Jamshidi narrated the following account of their visit to Hyderabad. The unannounced arrival of the National Spiritual Assembly representatives, with all nine Karachi Spiritual Assembly members alarmed Mr. Rostampur. Drawing Mr. Jamshidi aside he enquired, "*What are they here for? Have I done anything wrong?*" Assured the visitors had come for consultation with him, he made them comfortable in his room, served them refreshments. After a round of prayers, when Mr. Rostampur chanted the Tablet of Ahmad by heart in Urdu, in his resonant voice, it was explained to him that the Guardian wanted land to be purchased for the future Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Delhi. His response was immediate and positive. From various places in his room he took out packets of money totalling some Rs.25,000/-. He went down to his restaurant and reappeared with bank documents and sundry share certificates saying, *"This is the day I have been waiting for."* He placed his total savings before his guests with obvious relief. "This is my humble offering." That humble offering totalled Rs.100,190/-! The bewildered National Spiritual Assembly members incredulously queried Mr. Rostampur's intention to donate the entire amount towards the Temple Fund. The response was simple, natural. *"It is not my money. All of it belongs to Bahá'u'lláh, and I am happy to return it. I have been merely a trustee, a temporary keeper."* When the National Assembly members, realizing that Mr. Rostampur had kept back no money for any contingencies, requested him to retain a necessary sum for running his business and for his personal needs, the response was spontaneous. *"What I have given to the Cause I cannot take back. If I deserve it, surely Bahá'u'lláh will meet my needs."* Upon the insistence of the National Assembly members, and as a token of obedience, Mr. Rostampur agreed to keep Rs.190/-. Thus Mr. Ardeshir Rostampur's magnanimous donation of Rs.100,000/- paid for almost the total cost of the Bahapur estate.

In July 1980 Mr.Ardeshir Rustompur was invited to Delhi to view the on-going Temple construction. His response was that he did not wish any fuss to be made over him, nor any money spent on him, for he would view the Temple from the spiritual realms. He winged his flight on 11th. April 1982. The Universl House of Justice cabled: *"Assure relatives, friends of Ardeshir Rostampur ardent prayers progress soul Abha Kingdom. His exemplary devotion, detachment unforgettable."* As long as that magnificent edifice stands at Bahapur, will generations of Bahá'ís recall the dedication of Mr. Ardeshir Rostampur, and be inspired by his devotion.

Fund raising for the construction of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár was initiated in a strange manner, and from a most unexpected quarter - a prison in Mozambique. A Bahá'í serving a brief sentence for some petty offence, had carved nine simple rings out of ivory. He gifted one of these to Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum, then travelling through Africa. Addressing Bahá'ís at the dedication of the Panama Temple in 1972, Rúhiyyih Khánum expressed her thought that *"It would be lovely if we sent a little nest-egg*

from the dedication of this Temple for the next Bahá'í Temple that will be built," and she offered that humble ivory ring for sale. A young Bahá'í jeweller from Hawaii, at the dedication conference was so moved that he offered the most valuable gem he possessed - an exquisite emerald, valued at $25,000, in exchange for the ivory ring worth perhaps $1. Later, the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama travelled to Hawaii for the express purpose of receiving the emerald, which had in the meantime been set in a large gold setting. The gem was delivered to Rúhiyyih Khánum in 1973, during the International Convention in Haifa. She entrusted it to the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran, saying: *"I am going to entrust this to your Assembly. Whoever bids highest, can have it. And this is to be the first contribution for the future Mashriqu'l-Adhkár to be erected during the next Plan."* The emerald fetched a handsome $100,000 (Rs.1 million). Inscrutable are the ways of the Almighty. The simple ivory ring made in an African prison, offered with sincerity and devotion, became the largest single contribution, the nest-egg from the Panama Temple to the Mother Temple of India. When this touching story was narrated by Rúhiyyih Khánum on the occasion of the foundation stone laying ceremony at Bahapur on 17th October 1977, the gathered believers were so profoundly stirred, that none was left who made no spot cash offering or a generous pledge. Indeed many ladies divested themselves of their gold jewellery and offered them for the Temple Fund. Thus the simple restauranteur of Hyderabad, the anonymous prisoner of Mozambique, and the Hawaiian jeweller became the first and foremost benefactors of the Indian Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. The story of the devotion of this trio was narrated hundreds of times to inspire believers to emulate their example and to share in the great spiritual enterprise.

The Temple Fund was established by the National Spiritual Assembly in October 1977 during the Asian Bahá'í Women's Conference in New Delhi, when participants responded generously to the appeal of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum: *"Now friends, there are people here in this room of all kinds of means. Some of the friends are very poor. There is nothing the matter with being very poor. At one time Bahá'u'lláh was so poor He only had one shirt, and He had to stay in His room while they washed that shirt, and when it was dry He could put it on and come out of His room. So there is nothing the matter with being poor. Some of the friends have a little more money. Some of them are pioneers, but there are friends here who have difficulty in teaching the Faith. They come from Persia, they come from Arabia. It is very hard for them to open their mouths and proclaim the Message of Bahá'u'lláh. We know that Abdu'l-Bahá said that the Temple was the silent teacher. Every time we have erected a House of Worship to Bahá'u'lláh, it has taught the Faith more than any of us could ever do. This beautiful Temple that we have just seen will proclaim His Faith in Asia as none of the Bahá'ís, National Assemblies, Counsellors, Board Members, anybody, can do because it will speak with the voice of God silently to the people. I invite you, friends, to make contributions to this new enterprise that we are blessed by seeing the beginning of it ourselves, and tomorrow we will be present at the corner-stone laying."*

After the first flood of contributions at the Conference, Temple fund raising

was not actively pursued. The decision in 1980 to commence construction of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár spurred fund-rising activity. Ways and meand were devised to enable the largest number of Bahá'ís to share in this great spiritual enterprise. The Universal House of Justice advice was to *"use the Temple as an instrument for educating new believers about their obligation to contribute to the Bahá'í funds."* Thus it became imperative that news of Temple construction reached every Bahá'í heart and home throughout the sub-continent.

That the Universal House of Justice expected Bahá'ís of India to rise to the occasion was made clear in several moving messages. On the historic occasion of the first concrete pour on 31st.July 1980, they telexed: *"May Bahá'ís of India arise to meet responsibilities, render utmost assistance raising this beautiful edifice in the Name of Bahá'u'lláh."* A fortnight later came further encouragement: *"Although contributions are being received for this project from other countries, the Bahá'í s of India should themselves feel responsible for raising the Temple in their midst and have the bounty of taking a large share in contributing towards its construction."* Upon resumption of construction after a prolonged stoppage of work due to the Contractor's labour problems, the Universal House of Justice again advised on 22nd March 1984: *"... there is still room for increased activities among the Indian Bahá'ís, particularly in rural areas, to enhance such contributions."* In the same communication to the National Spiritual Assembly they underscored the importance of the Temple Fund: *"The House of Justice requests you to remind your State Teaching Committees of the importance of raising funds for the building of the Temple and to undertake the responsibility of devising ways and means to encourage the friends in their areas to contribute to this project."*

Vast distances and inadequate facilities make communication difficult anywhere. In India the communication and co-ordination of a country-wide campaign assumed himalayan proportions because of the different languages spoken in the states, and the high percentage of rural illiteracy. Our target was to reach out to some two million Bahá'ís, speaking 23 languages, and residing in 14,000 localities across the country. As soon as the office of the Temple Project was established in Delhi in March 1980, an information campaign was launched. Every national, regional and local Bahá'í publication in the country was furnished with, and urged to publish information on the Temple Project. The National Assembly devoted two major national communication channels, the May 1980 issue of the English Bahá'í News, and July issue of the Hindi Bahá'í Samachar for Temple coverage, with photographs and quotations. Besides, publications of State Bahá'í Councils carried the same information in regional languages. Similar information was reflected in newsletters of Local Spiritual Assemblies. The launch of such an unprecedented information drive generated a wave of excitement throughout the country. Something new and very tangible was happening that would alter the course of Indian Bahá'í history. A divine lotus was about to blossom in Delhi, and its roots needed to be planted deep in the noble hearts of believers everywhere - children, men and women, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, from urban and rural communities. No Bahá'í in India was to be deprived of the bounty of sharing in the raising of

their Mother Temple. Every means needed to be employed to make this exercise administratively possible, operationally simple and visibly fool-proof, in order to maintain the transparency and sanctity of the Bahá'í Fund.

In addition to fund-raising through Local Spiritual Assemblies, Temple Fund coupons with the Temple model picture, were printed in six distinctive colours and denominations, numbered and registered in carefully maintained ledgers. The coupons were to be exchanged for cash and the name of the donor noted on the counterfoil. This was a quick and simple operation. At community gatherings throughout the country Temple coupons were readily available, and friends freely availed of the cash-for-coupon system. Children in urban communities prided themselves on their collection of Temple Fund coupons, encashed with their own pocket money. In time, Temple Fund coupons were exchanged between friends as greetings and gifts.

The coupon encashment scheme was closely monitored. Each month announcements were made through the National Newsletter of the collections by Temple Fund representatives and Local Spiritual Assemblies. Giving to the Temple Fund assumed a new dimension - it was fun. "*Swell the Temple Fund - See the Temple rise*" read the slogan on all circulars and letters from the Temple Project office.

Pledge forms in Hindi and English, bearing the Temple model picture, with tear away slips, were dispatched to Assemblies for distribution, inviting Bahá'ís to share in the priceless privilege of raising the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. This means encouraged Bahá'ís to donate convenient, affordable, one-time or monthly sums over the projected construction period. The response was heart-warming. Each day the post brought more and more tear-away slips from the pledge forms, mostly for sums ranging from Rs.9/- to Rs.100/- per month. For each pledge a numbered account was opened, similar to a bank account, and a ledger maintained. As and when amounts were received, it was credited to the account and receipted. Believers called this the "Recurring Deposit Scheme of the bank of Baha'u'llah".

Briefings at Bahá'í conferences and gatherings became my responsibility. Presentation of reports of progress of construction, messages from the Universal House of Justice, etc. to Bahá'ís at every sizeable gathering in the country made a great impact. Bahá'ís arose to partner, in ever increasing measure, in the raising of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. While the generosity of the munificent donors of large sums was laudable, the contributions of the rich in spirit attracted special attention - the offerings of those who possessed little yet found something to give. Like the American lady whose heart ached to make a contribution towards the Chicago Temple. Having no money and nothing she could sell, she cut off the tresses of beautiful long hair that she cherished and prided upon, and selling it, joyfully offered the proceeds to the Temple fund. That act so touched the heart of Abdu'l-Bahá that she was praised for her sacrifice. Which heart has remained unmoved over the story of the dear elderly lady, who having nothing, so yearned to make an offering that she scoured the neighbourhood, praying that she might find something for use in constructing the Wilmette Temple? From a

construction site she trundled away a discarded stone to the Temple site in an old pram. Her sincerity and devotion so pleased Abdu'l-Bahá that her stone was made the corner stone of that monumental building. Where are the eyes that have remained dry on hearing of the impoverished native Panamanian lady, who walked miles from her village to the Temple site, bearing the offering of all she had, three eggs. Such evidences of firm faith and deep devotion, reminiscent of the valour and fervour of the heroes of the Cause of God, were manifested in India.

A humble Bahá'í sign-board painter in Nagpur had seen the picture of the Temple model, had received the Temple fund pledge form, but had nothing to give, save of his talent. His yearning heart prompted him to paint a picture of the Temple and offer it for sale to the State Teaching Committee of Maharashtra. The painting sold at the regional teaching conference in Devlali in April 1980 for Rs.6,000/-. The painter's cherished desire was fulfilled beyond his wildest dreams. Attending that same conference, three devoted believers detrained at Devlali station. Their destination, the Bahá'í Institute, was three miles away. They chose to walk the distance in the scorching summer heat, and saved for the Temple Fund the Rs.10/- they would pay to be driven in comfort in a horse-drawn carriage to the conference venue. Another touching contribution was the donation of the entire silver dower, a wedding gift from her husband, of the new bride from Sholapur. Only the sincerest love for Bahá'u'lláh could prompt such deeds!

Dang District, the home of a community of poverty-ridden tribals, perennially struggling for survival, also found ways to avail of the privilege. They had the spirit and devised ways to contribute their mite. Strung up on the thatched wall of the hut of a young Dangi was the Temple picture with the pledge form which illiteracy didn't allow him to fill. But he understood. His noble heart yearned to make a contribution, but he had nothing. He spent hours weaving a delicate bamboo basket to send for the Temple fund. His basket fetched a large sum at another conference. And his example moved audiences wherever the instance was cited. In another hut a fellow Dangi painstakingly carved the Greatest Name out of wood, which became his donation. It was important that news of the Temple construction had reached them and they were devising ways of supporting it. This wish of the Universal House of Justice was thus telexed to the National Spiritual Assembly on 23rd March 1984. *"…. there is still room for increased activities among the Indian Bahá'ís particularly in rural areas, to enhance such contributions….. requested to use the Temple as an instrument for educating new believers about their obligation to contribute to the Bahá'í funds."*

A region poorer than Dang was the tribal district of Bastar in eastern Madhya Pradesh, Central India. There too were lovers of Bahá'u'lláh - Bahá'í s rich in spirit. Nine members of a Local Spiritual Assembly determined they would not be deprived of the bounty of supporting the Temple Fund. They had no pockets to dig into, for they wore no shirts, and their loin cloths (dhotis) had no pockets. So they delved deep into their precious souls and pooled together Rs.1.50 (Fifteen cents). A representative walked miles to the nearest post office to send the amount by Money Order

to Delhi. This was one of the most precious and magnanimous contributions, the spiritual value of which perhaps equalled the value of the Hawaiian jeweller's contribution. The beloved Guardian, has emphasised, "*the greater the sacrifice, the greater will be the power of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* ". Surely from such sacrificial contributions will this Temple derive great strength.

It behoved Bombay, the mother communiy of the Bahá'ís of India, to bear the lion's share of the cost of our Mother Temple. A target of 9% of the total construction cost was suggested to them and no opportunity was missed to urge them to achieve that target. The response to the "gold-for-steel" plan, suggested to the ladies of Bombay was overwheliming. Many ladies contributed gold bangles, bracelets, rings, necklaces, but one outstanding donation needs be narrated. During the course of their visits, the ladies delegation reached the home of an Iranian famly, whose maid servant was a Bahá'í. The maid, serving refreshments to the visitors, overheard mention of the Temple Fund, saw her mistress divest herself of her gold bangles and hand over to the visitors. The humble maid too had the love of Bahá'u'lláh in her dear heart. She had planned to buy a gold necklace for her son's bride-to-be, but had managed to save enough money only to buy a pendant. The chain, to complete the necklace, was to be bought with further savings. She stunned her mistress and visiting ladies with the offer of her precious gold pendant, saying the Temple was more important than her son's marriage. That blessed soul was Laxmi, aptly named after the Hindu goddess of wealth.

Another suggested collection drive was for contributions to be made in memory of departed relatives and friends, not as a mere strategy to raise funds, but as a means of sharing the bounty of partnering the Temple construction project with souls in the spiritual realms. The response was beyond expectation, especially from Bombay. The donations received included the contribution of Rs.100,000/- offered on the anniversary of the passing of Mr. Narsinh Punjabi, a lover of the Cause, an indefatigable and popular treasurer of the Bombay Spiritual Assembly. Significant also were the repeated anonymous donations, in memory of "Hazrat Bahá'u'lláh , Hazrat Bab, Hazrat Abdu'l-Bahá, Hazrat Shoghi Effendi, Hazrat Tahirih, Hazrat Bahiyyih Khánum , ...". Each donation, was enclosed in an oval-shaped piece of paper, indicating in whose memory it was offered. From the handwriting, the donor was traced to Bombay, and a more unlikely person could not be linked with so thoughtful an act. The gentleman was of extremely modest means, and so humble and quiet that he could be lost in a group of three. He attended every community meeting and warmly greeted all, bowing low, with right hand at his breast. How deceptive are appearances and how unreliable are judgements. No wonder we are enjoined by the Blessed Beauty: *"Judge not, that ye be not judged."* Who could imagine the stature and nobility of that dear soul, who lowly before all, was so high in spiritual stature, so intoxicated in love for the Central Figures of the Faith and the Heroes of the Cause, that he remembered them and donated his mite in their sacred memory. The amount was immaterial, but the thought was exhilarating, uplifting. The exalted character of such souls is garbed in their utter humility. Incidentally, the Bombay Bahá'í

community maintained their 9% level consistently through the construction period and became the highest single contributing community.

In response to the March 1984 encouragement of the Universal House of Justice to raise the level of local contributions, all Centres were urged to observe the anniversary of the martyrdom of the Bab as a Day of Sacrifice, and to dedicate 9th July 1984 to fund raising for the Temple. Guidelines for an effective programme of the event were provided, with the draft of a proposed keynote address, which could, in the absence of a good speaker, be read out as a message from the Temple Project. The response was spectacular and universal.

The interest of believers everywhere was sustained with regular reportage through national and regional newsletters in India, and news magazines of other National Spiritual Assemblies. The river of inspiring letters that flowed from the Temple office ensured greater involvement of believers in the project. With acknowledgement of receipt of every donation went a personalized letter with news of the latest developments at site, of interesting events, even of particular problems. Sharing of news, good and bad, bridged the distance between donors and the project, giving them a sense of involvement and shared responsibility. Those letters were not circulars, but personal letters addressed to each donor, reciprocating their good wishes, responding to their requests for prayers at the Temple site, answering specific questions or providing special information. The exchange of letters established a personal bond. Donors ceased to be names on paper, but believers with tender love for the Cause. Expressions of their devotion for the Cause, especially from the farthest distant and remote islands of the South Pacific, was always deeply stirring.

An American couple preparing to celebrate their ninth wedding anniversary sent a $19 cheque. With the receipt for their donation, the couple was sent greetings and informed of the prayer offered for their happiness and success in Bahá’í service. As promptly, another cheque for $95 was received, which the couple had intended to spend on their celebrations. Another donor, an elderly American lady, shared her health problems and sought prayers at the Temple. Prayers were offered for her healing, and interestingly, the correspondence cheered her, as evidenced from her letters and increments in her regular contributions.

Special efforts were made to enable children share in the bounty of raising the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár. It was opportune for Bahá’í children to be enabled to share in perhaps the greatest spiritual enterprise of their generation. Letters went to all centres conducting children's classes to encourage the precious ones to contribute from their pocket-money. The response was heart-warming. Foremost among them was the girl who dropped ten paise (one cent) each day in a clay pot and sent Rs.3/- each month. And of a lad who, unknown to his parents, saved his bus fare to school by walking, denied himself goodies, scrounged in every way, and collected Rs.280/- ($28/-), over a period of four months. The lad had aimed at collecting Rs.300/-. His intention came to be known only when he sought a loan of the shortfall of Rs.20/- from his father. How blessed these children, how

glorious their future, how rewarding their services to the Cause! One of the first contributions received was from Bahá'í children of Western Samoa, where their own Temple was concurrently under construction. Another outstanding contribution was from the children of Lynn County, USA, whose names and photographs were obtained for the Temple archives. Prayers were offered for their progress, and a small cube of red sandstone was sent for each child. They will cherish that memento and perhaps show it off to their grand children some day. The children and pre-youth class of Amherst, USA, deserve special mention for their enterprise. They raised $140 by baking and selling cakes.

Encouragement through circulars, reports, and letters apart, the flow of contributions was closely monitored to assess the result of efforts at reaching the mass of believers, as desired by the Universal House of Justice. Each Bahá'í month reports were sent to State Councils, indicating contribution levels in relation to the adult Bahá'í population of each State. The emerging averages were revealing. It was encouraging to note the rise of monthly averages and increasing numbers of donors. The zeal and vigour with which fund-raising was pursued, in obedience to the wishes of the Universal House of Justice, continued unabated. And significantly, while Temple Fund contributions rose to an average of Rs.200,000/- ($20,000) per month, contributions to the National Fund also doubled during 1983-84. That was indication of the spiritual and financial prowess of Indian Bahá'ís.

Evidences of the steadfastness and dedication of believers came to the fore wherever and whenever opportunities were presented. The measure of their faith was on display at every gathering, conference and convention, when they rose to the occasion and met every challenge without flinching. Beside the large gatherings of Regional Teaching Conferences when participants clamoured to register their pledges, to make their offerings in cash and in kind, there were many small and intimate meetings that were addressed, some so small that more than expectation of contributions, the aim was to educate the friends on the importance and significance of this new and potent Institution under construction. Even at such meetings the new-found love for their Mashriqu'l-Adhkár was eloquently expressed in unexpected sacrificial outpourings. Many instances merit mention, but some claim attention over others. One such was a meeting in Delhi of representatives of selected Local Spiritual Assemblies, with sixteen delegates in attendance. Invited to speak to the small assemblage, construction progress was reported, and without premeditation, mention was made of the difficult cement situation and of the small allocation, received that very morning of 760 bags of cement for which payment was to be made. One dear friend interrupted the talk with his offer to pay the cost of one bag of cement. That burst, not the flood-gates but the dam itself. Two bags here, five bags there, nine bags, and the offers continued. Nineteen bags in memory of Hand of the Cause Dr. Muhajir, and so many stalwarts were remembered. Overshooting the 760 bags target, pledges were received for more than a thousand bags of cement at that small gathering of blessed souls. That was really the nascent power of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár - to move the hearts of believers. Referring to this mysterious power Abdu'l-Bahá had written, "*When the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, with its accessories*

(dependencies) is established in the world, aside from its religious or spiritual influence, it will have a tremendous effect upon civilization. Aside from the religionists who will feel its influence, materialists will not be exempt therefrom..." If materialists were influenced by the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár , how much more the believers? Our Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, just rising from its foundations had already cast its spell.

A memorable occasion was a conference in 1981 in Delhi, graced by Hand of the Cause of God, Mr. Paul Haney, for invitees from all parts of India. The subject of the conference was the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Offered a pre-lunch slot to speak about the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár on the concluding day, I reached the conference hall ahead of time, and signalled to the chairman. The session extended into the lunch break. When at last I was called and stood before a visibly tired and obviously hungry audience, it was evident that not much of what I had to say would register. How could the participants be made to sit up, to listen? The answer came like a bolt from the blue. Paying due respects to the Hand of the Cause, and expressing gratitude to the conference organisers, a question was posed to the audience."How many Institutions have we in Bahá'í administration?" The choral response was quick and correct. Two - the appointed and the elected Institutions. I shook my head and remarked that there was a third Institution! That was incomprehensible. Puzzled looks appeared all round as participants stared at each other. Even Mr. Haney looked at me askance from the first row. All eyes and ears were suddenly attentive. All wondered what I had to say that had not been discussed thoroughly over three days about the institutions of the Cause? I blurted, "There indeed is a third Bahá'í Institution - the constructed institution!" The house came down with a roar and Mr. Haney's was the heartiest laughter. Spontaneous, and without pre-meditation, Bahá'u'lláh showed the way to attract and hold the attention of the audience. Gone was the tiredness. For the next thirty minutes the participants sat with rapt attention and learned about the significance of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. Their appreciation was reflected in their generous contributions before they left for a well-deserved lunch.

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár attracted donations from across the Bahá'í world, remitted through the World Centre or directly to the Project. The single community denied this privilege was the beleaguered Iranian community. The immediate post-revolution period brought great distress and persecution upon the patient and steadfast believers in the cradle of the Faith. Two hundred and four leading Bahá'ís - Counsellors, members of the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, scientists, doctors, lawyers, educationists - the cream of the community - were executed. Hundreds were arbitrarily thrown into prison on frivolous charges. Dozens lost their homes and businesses. Students were expelled from schools and colleges. Their only consolation during their privations was news of the rise of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Delhi. Stories of their sufferings and sacrifices generated world-wide sympathy for the Faith, and moved their co-religionists around the globe to arise, as never before, in service to the Cause. Through their sufferings and sacrifices the Faith received unprecedented publicity around the globe, and won many friends and sympathizers amongst the world's leaders. Many contributions were

received from Bahá'ís outside Iran in memory of the martyrs, as their names were announced and stories of their heroism broadcast. But that blessed community was not to be entirely deprived from sharing in the raising of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. Some did devise ways to send small contributions in kind. We did receive the gold ring of the Greatest Name from a Bahá'í in an Iranian prison, brought out by a released prisoner! Tokens of their devotion were abundant. Under the most daunting circumstances, when their very lives were in danger, members of that heroic community demonstrated their devotion and abiding love for the Faith.

If the dearly loved believers of Iran, those steadfast heroes of God who won the admiration of the world, were prevented from sharing in the raising of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, that same community led the Bahá'í world in the Temple Maintenance Fund. Representing Bahá'í s who had laid down their lives in the wave of post-revolution persecutions in Iran, two hundred and four red roses in a silver vase held the reverent attention of the audience at the Temple dedication conference. The National Spiritual Assembly offered those roses to raise funds for the Temple maintenance. The thought of making the beloved martyrs partners in the Temple maintenance galvanized conference participants. They queued up, many joyfully tendered $1000 each, and with great love and reverence, hand-picked their roses. Those were not roses being bought, although it might go into the Guiness Book of Records as the most highly prized flowers, but it was the manifestation of the love and admiration of the believers for those who had made the supreme sacrifice of their lives for their belief in Bahá'u'lláh . A dear Indian villager, also stirred and moved, came up for a rose. He offered a Rs.100/- note, the worth of which was no less than the $1000 of his affluent brothers and sisters. Thus the recent Iranian martyrs initiated and swelled the Temple maintenance fund.

Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged American believers to support the construction project of the Chicago Temple with the stirring words: *"Whosoever arises for the service of this building, shall be assisted with great power from His Supreme Kingdom, and upon him spiritual and heavenly blessings shall descend. ... I hope that all the beloved of God collectively, men and women, will strive night and day, until the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár be erected in the utmost solidity and beauty."* These words have universal relevance and apply to every plan and project of Mashriqu'l-Adhkár construction and maintenance. Therefore, those who supported the Temple Project earned the good pleasure of their Lord, and attracted blessings from the Sacred Threshold upon themselves and their families.

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LAYING FOUNDATION STONE

Restoration of the Temple estate to the National Spiritual Assembly by the government paved the way for laying the foundation stone of the future Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. The following cablegram was received from the Universal House of Justice on 10th October 1977.

"Overjoyed removal obstacles use Temple site. Welcome presence Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum in your midst occasion Women's Conference enabling you hold befitting ceremony marking initiation project construction Mother Temple Indian sub-continent. Calling on Amatu'l-Bahá represent House Justice momentous occasion lay foundation stone historic edifice. Fervently praying noble institution soon to be reared your soil will attract added divine blessings upon community whose teaching success stands unequalled entire Bahá'í world."

Exactly one week later, over a thousand Bahá'ís from Asian, African, American, European and Australasian countries participating in the Asian Bahá'í Women's Conference, gathered at Bahapur. Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum recalled for the gathering, the occasion in the Holy Land, when she was invited to view the Temple model with members of the Universal House of Justice, and how deeply impressed she was with the design and the spiritual symbolism of the lotus. That auspicious day, the 17th October 1977, will long be remembered when Rúhiyyih Khánum, assisted by Mr. Sahba, laid the marble foundation stone of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. The seed was sown. The lotus would take root.

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VYING FOR HONOURS

Winning the contract to build the Bahá'í Temple became a prestige issue in the construction fraternity. As prevailing laws prohibited foreign construction companies to take up projects in India, leading Indian companies vied for the honour. A dozen reputed companies purchased tender documents, but half did not bid for the work after perusal of the complex drawings. Evaluation of remaining tenders led to short-listing of two reputed contractors, M/s Tirath Ram Ahuja (TRA) and M/s Engineering Construction Corporation Ltd. (ECC). TRA was a leading contractor in North India, well-administered and tightly controlled by technically qualified and well experienced members of a single family. They had to their credit the construction of several foreign embassy buildings in Delhi, and their forte was immaculate building finishes. ECC was a well-known subsidiary of India's largest engineering conglomerate, M/s Larsen & Toubro Ltd. The strength of this contractor lay in their extensive infrastructure and professionalism. They had to their credit major industrial and commercial projects, including India's first atomic power plant. They were also the foremost Indian contractor to successfully foray into the international construction field and bag major contracts abroad, including the Dubai International Airport. ECC staked their reputation on good concrete structural works. After careful study of the portfolios of both companies by Mr. Sahba, assessment of their capacity and potential, inspection of their completed and on-going projects, the choice fell upon ECC, despite their considerably higher quotation.

The contract award signalled the beginning of in-depth technical consultations between Mr. Sahba, Dr. Flint's representative Mr. Roberts, and ECC engineers. Technical details, explained and understood, the

Contractor's proposed construction sequence was discussed, out of which emerged many more useful clarifications. Finally, their works item rates were analysed to ensure they had allowed for all inputs and would not be faced with unexpected costs that could cause problems for them and the Project. This last exercise brought to light some omissions, a major miscalculation being the quantity of structural steel needed for temporary staging works. ECC had allowed for a fraction of the total quantity of steel, having planned to rotate and re-use elements, which was not feasible. In order to cover the Contractor against cost of additional steel, at Mr. Sahba's suggestion, a clause was added in the contract to allow extra payment of Rs.1.4 million on this account. Though not the responsibility of a client to do so, Mr. Sahba thought it was expedient to safeguard the interest of the contractor and ensure steady progress of work. This unprecedented step was appreciated by ECC and proved a boon. After final review and inclusion of points that arose out of the negotiations, the contract was finalized and signed on 20th. April, the eve of Ridvan 1980, by representatives of the National Spiritual Assembly and Engineering Construction Corporation Ltd., respectively Mr. R. N. Shah, and Mr. J. L. Menezes. This became the 'Project Bible'. Mr. Sahba and I, respectively as Project Manager and representative of the National Spiritual Assembly, determined at the outset, to set an example to the Contractor by our honest and close adherence, in letter and spirit, to every condition of the contract, and so also to hold the Contractor strictly to the same. The contract conditions would remain inviolate, neither altered nor diluted, unless specifically agreed by both parties under extenuating circumstances. With a prayer, a heart full of goodwill and a handshake, the legal agreement and the mobilisation advance cheque were handed over to ECC. The projected cost was Rs.55 million, and construction period estimated at three years.

The legal contract signed, understandings were also arrived at with the contractor to make the project and construction site a model, in terms of orderly management and cordial labour relations, because the unusual nature of the project would attract the attention not only the Indian construction fraternity and public, but also international attention. The client being a religious organization of repute, and involving their co-religionists internationally, made it imperative to maintain the highest standards in all respects. Moreover, to ensure the success of the project, in terms of good workmanship and maximum outputs, it was agreed that appropriate steps be taken, beyond mere implementation of labour laws, to encourage and generate interest and enthusiasm among the staff and labour, to win the confidence of the entire contingent and keep all reasonably happy, without pandering to unreasonable demands. Towards this end, our Contractor took appropriate steps to demonstrate their goodwill and establish cordial working relations. The extra-ordinary facilities planned were efforts at creating an atmosphere of mutual goodwill between labour, Contractor and Client. It was hoped, this would create and mainain an atmosphere of cordiality, confidence and co-operation, and avoid the viral trade union activity that often plagued and paralysed construction projects.

Accordingly, half the Temple estate was agreed to be fenced off for the

labour colony. Proper tenements with electricity, water supply and sanitation were to be built and allotted to worker families. Living quarters offered them would perhaps be better than the humble homes they owned. A two-room school building was planned, to serve as a creche and classroom for children of working families. Children would thus be kept safely away from the construction area, and provided with basic education. A labour canteen was planned to provide workers with tea, cold drinks, snacks and meals at subsidized rates. Workers could hope for nothing more!

All workers were to be provided with proper helmets, and safety harnesses for those who worked at heights. First aid arrangements were to be made at site to ensure immediate care for the injured, and additional arrangements with a nearby medical center to rush aid in case of serious accidents.

Traditional festivals like the colourful spring *holi* festival and *Divali* new year were to be fully paid holidays for workers. The important annual Vishwakarma *pooja* would also be a paid holiday and suitably observed. The mythical Lord Vishwakarma, the divine architect and artisan of the Purana age, is revered and worshipped by Hindu craftsmen, mechanics, carpenters and artisans. Tools and implements of different trades used are worshipped and blessings sought for success. The *pooja* brings workers of all trades and grades together in friendship and co-operation. On the occasion of the first Vishwakarma day a special film on the Temple was shown to staff and workers, so they understood and appreciated they were engaged, not in the construction of a commercial, industrial or residential building, but were creating an edifice, a temple for the worship of God, and that their sincere inputs would attract blessings upon them and their families.

Upon contract finalization, the Universal House of Justice telexed an encouraging and heart-warming message on 22nd April 1980. "*Supplicate Bahá'u'lláh divine blessings noble efforts Indian Bahá'í s achieve outstanding victories. Overjoyed commencement contract building beautiful temple. Congratulate Sahba assure him loving prayers.*"

No client in India furnishes a contractor with complete project drawings upon award of a contract. Usually architectural, structural, electrical and plumbing plans are provided as construction progresses. ECC was surprised to be given over four hundred drawings and plans, with two volumes of specifications for materials and workmanship. A voluminous bar-bending schedule described, in terms of diameter, length and shape, every steel reinforcement bar to be used. Four addtional sets of such drawings, specifications and schedules, were also provided to ECC for their site engineers, supervisors, and sub-contractors. That meant churning out over two thousand large blue-prints and innumerable photo-copies of other documents. To save costs we purchased our own machine – one of those manually operated units using the photographic process to transfer the image of a document on to a 'master', from which 'positives' were processed. It took a good five minutes to copy a single document. That slow, sturdy machine, churned out thousands of copies of documents during the three years it was in use. And then the technology revolution brought plain paper copiers that turned out sharp,

crisp copies with the touch of a button. The old war-horse was so suddenly obsolete that it could not be sold for any price. It was scrapped. And also to minimize the cost of churning out more than two thousand blue prints from tracings, we availed of the kind offer of our plumbing consultant. Over a long holiday week-end when his office was closed, using his equipment and our materials, his peon Bahadur and our Bhattiji churned out blue-prints en-masse. The photo-copied documents were bound into hard-cover volumes, and blueprints patiently sorted into sets for the Contractor.

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THE DIVINE HAND

Building construction is commonplace around the world. Iconic buildings with innovative designs pay eloquent tribute to the ingenuity of designers, the skill of builders, and the enterprise of building materials manufacturers. These three contributory factors facilitate or hinder the progress of construction projects. In the western world designers could let their imagination run free, in the knowledge that the widest range of building materials was readily available, and that a highly mechanized construction industry could execute the most complicated works. All that was required was the finance to translate a designer's dream into reality. Not so in India of the 80's, when the construction industry survived under archaic laws and severe constraints. So, Temple architectural and structural designs prepared in England had perforce to take into account Indian building codes, level of technology, availability of materials, and prevailing laws, which did not permit import of construction skill, machinery, or material. The construction industry was thus struggling with available local technology and skill, and compelled to use locally produced material, if and when available. Hence, what was described to be an unusual and difficult construction in a technologically advanced country, called for superhuman efforts in India because of prevailing circumstances and constraints. Accounts appearing in the following pages are factual descriptions of problems faced during the the construction period 1980 - 1986.

India, a land amply blessed by nature, also suffered immensely from its vagaries. The lives of a billion people depend directly upon, or are influenced in great measure by the seasonal rainfall. A good and timely monsoon holds out the prospects of a rich harvest of food grains, as well as the generation of much needed hydro-electricity. Thus agriculture and industry alike depend upon rainfall. Shortage or excessive rainfall causes grievous human sufferings and disasters. Monsoon failures spell doom for rural India. Severe droughts drive the rural poor through starvation and distress, and all-but bring industry to a standstill for want of electricity. On the other hand, floods wipe out not just crops and fields, but entire villages, leaving in their wake destruction and devastation. India's continuous struggle towards self-sufficiency, progress and stability therefore was aided or set back by the "rain-gods".

On the agricultural front a good measure of success was achieved in 1980 by timely steps by government. On the industrial front, local production, supplemented by government controlled imports, could not satisfy demands

of all sectors. With a normal rainfall to generate maximum electricity to keep the wheels of industry turning, steel and cement production was far short of requirements. In dry years, with reduced power supply to factories and mills, the situation became desperate. 1980, a second consecutive dry year, held out gloomy prospects for agriculture and industry. Food grains from buffer stocks, augmented by imports, staved off rural starvation, but industry virtually ground to a halt. Steel mills and cement factories produced a fraction of their capacity, being allotted 25% to 40% of their electricity requirements. Many industries stalled due to power supply being switched off to prevent use of electricity beyond rationed loads. Hundreds of small factories closed down. Many resorted to the use of generators, which was far costlier energy source, and incidentally caused diesel oil shortage. While faltering industry brought severe hardship to a huge industrial labour force, the curtailed production of cement and steel spelt doom for the construction industry. A senior construction consultant, enumerating the number of stalled projects all over the country for want of steel and cement, advised us to postpone commencement of Temple construction by one year. Despite such gloomy prospects, we embarked upon our construction venture with faith in our hearts and prayers on our lips. Besides shortages and non-availability of building materials, files had to be moved through labyrinths of bureaucracy. On this front we faced few problems, for providentially, in every department our files came to be dealt with by officials whose religious sentiments prompted maximum co-operation. Honest persuasion prevailed everywhere, every time. Besides, the Divine Hand was ever with us.

Events described in the following pages bear out unequivocally that, more than men and machines, the Bahá'í Temple was raised by inflexible faith, unflinching devotion, and loving sacrifice. That a merciful Providence sustained and aided the Project is the unsolicited testimony of ECC Project Manager, Mr. J. Ganguly: *"Though I did not have any religious or spiritual stirrings, looking back I am certain that there was some Divine Hand leading us. I do believe this is His creation."* Participating in the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Temple, Mr. Ganguly further commented that his every effort to replicate techniques and procedures, developed and successfully executed at the Temple, had failed on his projects elsewhere. Every development at the Project bears indisputable testimony that beyond architectural and engineering ingenuity, beyond the labours of a six-hundred strong army of skilled workers, there were unseen forces at work. This was the strong feeling not only of Bahá'ís but also of many non-Bahá'ís involved in this spiritual enterprise.

Our construction team, ably and energetically led by Mr. Sahba, and constantly encouraged by the Universal House of Justice, was inspired and motivated by the reassuring and enduring promise of Bahá'u'lláh: "*Verily we behold you from our realms of glory and shall aid whosoever will arise for the triumph of our Cause with the hosts of the Concourse on High and a company of our favoured angels.*" Fortified with faith, mysteriously and miraculously, this monumental edifice was completed in the name of the Creator of the universe, and dedicated to all mankind. The help of the unseen hand was evident throughout, but more than anywhere else, in the

field of materials procurement, so crucial to the construction schedule.

The availability of proper infrastructure, in terms of equipment and machinery, adequate manpower, and timely supply of construction materials, determine the rate of progress of construction projects. Arranging for infrastructure and manpower was the responsibility of the Contractor. Ensuring availability of construction materials was the Client's. That meant this writer's responsibility. A great privilege, and a grave responsibility! Happily, despite numerous hurdles, required materials of specified quality were procured in good time, and no delay or loss was caused. Inexperienced as I was, my total reliance at all times was upon the Divine Hand. All these years later, as I recall the experiences, I continue to be amazed and often to be moved to tears.

Water

A locale without water can be imagined in the Arabian or Sahara desert, not in the city of Delhi. But that was precisely the situation. The Temple estate was without water! So that was the first basic requirement we needed to arrange for. We were contract-bound to make water available to the Contractor within three months - by 20th.July 1980. If we failed the Contractor could procure tanker-loads of water and levy a surcharge of 0.25% of the value of completed construction work. That made it imperative that we sourced our own water for construction, as also for future landscaping and other incidental needs. Contracts were awarded to agencies for boring two tube-wells, and three months was conservatively estimated to be sufficient to bore the two wells. In most areas of Delhi the water table being at a depth of 15-20 meters, a well could be bored within a month. However, Temple estate being at a higher elevation, the water table was estimated to be at a depth of 50 meters and the target appeared achievable with an estimated drilling speed of 5-6 meters per week. Alarm bells began to ring when drilling speed fell to a meter a week. The spectre of having to bring in construction water in tanker-loads loomed large. The drilling process was so slow and uneconomical that one of the contractors abandoned his work. The second contractor kept on grudgingly. As weeks extended into months, hopes of meeting the water-supply deadline dimmed.

Prayers for water increased in fervour to anguish. By June-end the tube-well had reached a depth of 30 meters, leaving just three weeks to the deadline. Frenzied enquiries led us to an internationally funded organization called AFPRO - Action for Food Production - whose primary objective was to assist farmers locate water for agriculture. They were persuaded to carry out a survey of the Temple estate, to identify possible tube-well sites. Their team of hydrologists spent a hot summer day in the scorching sun, carrying out resistivity tests across the estate. Results were discouraging, until they took a line from an operational tube-well in the adjoining park, some 150 metres away. A site just two metres inside the eastern boundary was marked as the highest yielding location, with a possible yield of 25,000 litres an hour. My parched throat could barely rasp out an audible "thank God", but my incredulous heart wanted to see the water out of the rock. Other locations had water, the hydrologists concluded, but the yield was uneconomical. Our hope was the spot near the eastern boundary, marked and guarded as one

would guard a gold mine. Surveys done, we had just three weeks to bore a well.

A Swedish Christian Missionary organization called Water Development Agency was located at an obscure town named Betul, on the border between the States of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Their director was passing through Delhi on his way home on furlough. He was contacted at the YMCA and samples of the granitic rock from Temple land were shown him. He examined the rock and confirmed that their drilling equipment could bore one tube-well per day through the hardest rock. That sounded like a tall claim, but I was ready to grab at any straw, if it led to water!

An overnight train journey took me to Betul. Though a missionary organisation, Water Development Agency functioned in a very business-like manner. Their manager expressed regret that their rigs were fully booked for the next four months. It was only after the urgency was explained and it was impressed upon him that we had met his director in Delhi, that he relented, grumbling that he could drill a dozen bores during the time spent in sending the rig the thousand kilometers to Delhi. Rates were negotiated and terms settled. Their sophisticated “Down The Hole Hammer” (DTHH) rig, a support truck with casing pipes and other materials, and personnel in a jeep would leave for Delhi within a week. The seven days were needed to procure special transit permits to authorise their vehicles to pass through the states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi. That left a fortnight to our deadline!

The small convoy of rig and support vehicles arrived in Delhi on schedule. The team was welcomed with tea and snacks to refresh them after their arduous journey. The rig was then driven to and positioned over the ‘gold mine’. Drilling commenced after the traditional coconut-breaking ceremony, and distribution of sweets. I offered a silent prayer. The drill's hammering and revolving action pounded the rock, and forced the powdered stone out of the growing bore by the force of compressed air. The speed with which it bit into the rock was incredible. Cutting through the overburden of soft rock, the crushed stone brought to the surface was a distinct brown, but gradually changed to blue-grey as it reached harder granitic strata. Fifteen meters, twenty, thirty meters, and the crushed rock coming to the surface was bone dry. At 32 metres it was moist. Ah, I thought, water at last! No, not yet. The powdered rock changed its hue slightly as the drill bit deeper into the bowels of the earth, but it got no wetter. Beyond 45 metres, I was sure we would get water. With eyes glued to the bore head, and the Greatest Name on my lips, I stood anxiously, hour after hour, by the rig. Maybe the next meter would bring up water. The roar of the diesel engine, the staccato hammering of the drill against the rock, and the hiss of compressed air, put the sun to bed. The geologist kept collecting samples from different depths, making entries in his bore log. The night deepened, the inquisitive crowd evaporated, and I was left alone with the tired drilling crew. Hope turned into despair. The drilling crew was as disappointed as I was. They continued drilling beyond 60 metres, expecting to reach some vein or underground stream at any moment. Hope surged and ebbed as the powdered rock became alternately moist and dry. The expected gush of

water did not materialize. By midnight we reached a depth of 75 metres. Inviting the crew for a tea-break, I rushed to the home of the hydrologist who had assured us of the prolific yield at that spot. He reluctantly returned with me to site, studied the bore log, the samples of crushed rock from different depths, and was distinctly puzzled. He asked the crew to drill deeper. At the depth of 85 metres I stopped them. We were not going to pay for deepening a dry hole. The hydrologist pleaded with the drilling crew to go down another few metres. They obliged. But no water gushed from that bore. It was capped and abandoned.

The drilling team retired for a well-deserved rest. I returned to the site office, disturbed, distraught, and dismayed. So much money expended, so much time and effort spent, such fervent prayers offered, and we still had no water. We were not mining for gold, we sought only water, and that for constructing the House of Worship. Where was the Holy Concourse? Why were our prayers not answered? Sleep evaded me. It was already the wee hours of the morning, so I remained at site praying.

The next morning, a Saturday, the rig was moved to a second location. Drilling commenced with a prayer. At 35 metres a trickle of water appeared and we continued to 55 metres. The geologist opined it was futile to drill further. We cased the bore with steel perforated pipe to prevent a cave-in, and capped it for possible future use. With an estimated yield of only 1,500 litres per hour it could perhaps serve as a stand-by well, operated with a hand pump. The rig was then moved to a third location, with no better results. What could we do now? How many more bores could we drill and abandon? How much more money could we sink into dry bores? How could God deny us water? Hammered by such thoughts, questions, doubts, I signalled the drilling crew to take a break. I sulked away. Alone in the site office I burst into tears and cried aloud to Bahá'u'lláh for strength to persevere. There was nothing more I could do. My helplessness was complete. Tears and prayers over, I set out for my room in Bahá'í House. At the point in the road where I should turn right towards Bahá'í House, quite involuntarily I turned left. It was as if someone wrenched the steering wheel of the car from me. I struggled against the steering wheel to no avail. The car kept going in the opposite direction. What was happening? Where was I headed?

A short distance along that road was the Zamrudpur office of the Municipal Water Department, Delhi Jal Board, where the concerned officer had already regeretted it was not permissible to provide us Municipal water for construction. What purpose could be served seeing him again? He was not in anyway. So I walked into the office of the Executive Engineer. Rather, it was as if I was propelled towards his office by an unseen hand. The Executive Engineer, received me courteously. The purpose of my visit and our predicament was explained. He confirmed that Municipal water was supplied for domestic purposes only and reiterated the impossibility of sanctioning water for construction work. All the steps we had taken were enumerated to convince him that we had spared neither money nor effort; that prospects of locating water at site were indeed bleak; that we could not relocate the Temple; and that if he didn't help us, then who would? Finally I

ventured a question: *“Sir, if water was required to build a Hindu temple what would you do?”* He thought for a moment, then agreed to send an inspector to verify our statements, after which he would see what could be done. Providentially, at that very moment, the inspector walked in. He confirmed all our efforts. Now convinced, the Executive Engineer sat thoughtfully looking down at his desk, while I silently repeated the Greatest Name. And then he enquired. *"What quantity of water do you need?"* I had estimated we could do with a generous supply of 200,000 litres per day, knowing how water was used at construction sites, but knew also that, with controls, we could manage with less. I replied, *"Two hundred thousand litres, Sir"*. His reply was heavenly music: *"I can give you a maximum of 100,000 litres a day."* I broke down and sobbed unabashedly. The surprised officer comforted me. While we waited for the tea he ordered, he handed me the official application form, which he signed, sanctioning the connection of a new water supply line. While signing away 100,000 litres daily of filtered drinking water for a construction project he mused, *"I have not sanctioned a small 12 mm. domestic water connection so quickly. I do not know how I have approved such a large connection.!" "Sir”* I responded. *“you are not doing it. God is doing it through you, because it is for His work."* Thanking him profusely I left his office, clutching the precious sanctioned water connection form, which he wanted back, duly filled, on Monday. Driving out of that office compound in a state of bewilderment, I realized and admitted to myself that my tears were not all of joy and relief. They were mingled with tears of shame and guilt. Happy beyond words that Bahá’u’lláh had answered my prayers, I was ashamed at the shallowness of my faith, that I harboured doubts that He could abandon us. After that first lesson I never doubted nor felt alone and helpless. *"As your faith, so shall your powers and your blessings be"* I kept reminding myself. Through subsequent problems these thought-provoking words of Abdu’l-Bahá echoed in my mind.

Back at site I reported the developments at site with the dry bores, and at the Municipal Office to Mr. Sahba. Although relieved that we were assured of water to commence construction, we were both concerned over the high cost of Municipal water. Mr. Sahba decided we make a final drilling effort at a location of our choosing, not any recommended by hydrologists, or a water diviner we had in desperation flown over from Madras. We recited a prayer each, walked out and selected a spot in a low-lying area, where there was a dip in the rock structure. The rig was moved there and drilling commenced. I stood rooted to the spot as the drilling progressed. The Holy Concourse heard my prayers above the staccato sound of the drill, for we struck water at 53 metres. The yield? Some 6,000 litres per hour. Two "miracles" in a single day. I needed no further assurance that the Holy Concourse was with us.

Our search for water continued, because the 6,000 litres per hour yield might just suffice construction needs. The future needs of the Temple would be far greater. We drilled and abandoned another two bores but didn’t risk going deeper than 32 meters. The first ever DTHH drilling operation in Delhi, which attracted much attention and cost us a great deal, left us with one viable bore, another with an uneconomical yield, and two completely dry holes. The viable bore became operational within a week and our water

supply commitment to the Contractor was fufilled. Happily, the yield from this bore increased significantly with continued pumping.

The chugging of the diesel motor of the other drilling contractor continued for several weeks more. Here was no geologist, nor bore log which could give any indication of reaching water. Deciphering the markings and veins on the rock cylinders cut out of the bore provided the only clues. The drillers kept our hopes alive by showing us veins in the cylinders but the yield, they said, was in the hands of God! Such speculations kept us drilling until we reached 56 metres. Yield tests indicated a steady 5000 litres per hour. Amazingly, here too with continuous pumping the yield increased steadily. Now, with a water resource of more than 10,000 litres per hour, and with adequate storage facilities, sufficient water could be pumped to work locations wherever needed. As a safeguard and to ensure adequate water supply for future needs Mr. Sahba decided to avail of the permission granted by the Municipal Water Department by taking a connection directly from the reservoir that supplied water to the vast south Delhi region. Our industrious handy-man, Mr. Saberi supervised the laying of a pipe-line from the reservoir, some two hundred meters distant in the park opposite the Temple, to two underground storage tanks of 50,000 litres capacity each. But because of the high Municipal tariff, it was expedient to rely on our own water resources and to fall back upon Municipal supplies only to make up any shortfall. Water conservation measures were also devised so that rain water, as well as water from building-washing operations, drained into storage tanks for irrigation. Additionally water stored in the pools was available for fire-fighting operations. Thus no matter how severe the summer and how parched Delhi was, the Temple would remain green and clean. As Bahá'u'lláh provided for the water for His Mashriqu'l-Adhkár , so the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár would, for centuries to come, offer to thirsting humanity the elixir of life.

Electricity

Concurrent with efforts to locate water, were exertions to arrange for electricity. It was amazing that a pocket in the busy, bustling city of Delhi was without electricity, like some remote rural village. The area surrounding the estate was a designated green zone, and hence not electrified. The short-term remedy was to use diesel operated machines where possible and use a generator to run other electrically operated machines.

Prevailing rules permitted use of generators only by electricity connection holders, as an alternate energy source in the event of power failures. So we did not qualify for permission to use a generator. With difficulty we secured the necessary permission, and arranged to buy a 60 KVA diesel generator. Offers from noted suppliers were scrutinized, and short-listed suppliers interviewed. Far lower than other quoted rates was the offer of M/s Power Engineers, a privately owned and relatively unknown company. Making sure our requirements and specifications were clearly understood, we asked the owner how his rate was so much lower than others. He explained that as he assembled generators in his own factory, with components specified by clients his overheads were low. That was logical but not quite convincing.

Sensing hesitation on our part, the supplier made a surprising move. He opened his brief case, took out his company letter-head, signed and stamped it, and handing it over saying, "*This should dispel all your doubts*". This was totally unexpected. Was this a measure of his confidence, or his desperation to bag an order, or his trust that we would not misuse his blank, signed letter? Perhaps all, but this act cemented a special relationship between the Project and the generator supplier. He not only fulfilled the first supply contract, but also a second one. He also satisfactorily carried out minor electrical contract works.

The cost of generated power was exorbitant and moreover inadequate to operate the tower crane and the full range of construction machinery. So securing power from government controlled Delhi Electric Supply Undertaking (DESU) was crucial. The power situation during summer of 1980 deteriorated to crisis proportions. Hopes of having the site electrified within the three month site mobilization period were belied.

Foundation concreting commenced on 30th. July 1980 using diesel driven equipment and electrically operated machines powered by diesel generators. The site came alive with the chug of diesel motors and whine of vibrators. Regular electric supply was yet months away.

The Contractor's tower crane, the largest and tallest yet used in India, standing conspicuously above the horizon, could be put to limited use with the inadequate generated power. As work gathered momentum through the autumn and winter of 1980, the inadequacy of dieselized equipment became apparent and the power situation became critical. With relentless pressures and pleas upon DESU, the site was provided with a temporary power supply in May 1981. Operation of the tower crane considerably accelerated podium slab concreting then in progress, and all further operations.

The change at site from the pre-electrification period was "electrifying". A new impetus was injected into the works with the serviceability of equipment hiterto unusable. The stalled work of temporary steel staging fabrication and support systems for the arches, petals and interior dome commenced, and continued at a frenzied pace round the clock. The night sky over Bahapur was lit up with welding work, and newly installed security flood lights. The site wore a festive look from a distance.

Having run the DESU gauntlet to secure temporary power supply for the construction period, enough was learned to apply in good time for the permanent supply. Applications supported by required documents were submitted fully one year in advance. The quest for a heavy power connection in a non-electrified zone was an odyssey. The DESU Planning Department studied the proposal, evaluated load requirements, assessed feasibility of supply, determined the source and location of load distribution, planned cable routes, specified necessary electrical equipment, etc. Technical hurdles cleared from the Planning Department, our file went next to the Administration Department. Necessary contracts and agreements were drawn up. The Accounts Department then made cost estimates and determined payments to be made. Finally, the Works Department executed

the work and energized the site. This simple sounding procedure was protracted over a full year, leaving us in doubt as to whether we would have electricity for the Dedication ceremony. We made it by the skin of our teeth! The site was fully energized a fortnight before the dedication deadline.

Steel

Water and electricity were not the only issues that haunted us. Steel was also a major problem. Structural and reinforcement steel was under strict government control and distributed through the Steel Authority of India Ltd. (SAIL). The Project requirement was 1,200 metric tons of reinforcement bars of different diameters. Applications, with copies of plans, engineer's certificate, and endless other documentation, were submitted for scrutiny to the SAIL Branch Office. Receiving no allocation, we represented before senior officers in the Divisional Office. Our contractual commitments and urgency were explained, their religious sentiments touched upon, all to no avail. The Divisional Manager accepted the gift of a Temple picture with genuine reverence. Touching it to his forehead, he had it fixed on the wall facing him. They were impressed, but quite helpless. There just was no steel available.

As the weeks passed and the Contractor's preparatory work progressed, reinforcement bars would soon be required for column foundations. The time factor now critical, it was expedient to represent directly before the seniormost executive of SAIL. The Managing Director was extremely courteous, but more formal than his junior officers. He heard our plea, and replied tersely that there was nothing he could do. We would have to wait like everyone else until the situation improved. I had come to the highest authority, full of hope that at least our immediate requirement of foundation steel would be met, to avoid stoppage of work. I just could not leave empty handed. Pleas that we were contract-bound, that this was an international project, that the entire Bahá'í world was involved and concerned, were all answered with the same expression of regret. To his every refusal some further argument, justification, explanation and plea was put forth to give him ground for a special priority allocation. Seeing that I would not leave with a refusal, the official rose from his chair, took out a file from a cabinet, and placing it on the table before me said, somewhat agitatedly, *"This is the file of a government defence project. Full payment has been received in February. In six months I have not been able to release one kilogram of steel to them. From where am I to allocate 1200 tons of steel for a temple construction!"* Quite alarmed at the seriousness of the situation and convinced of his helplessness, I offered a final comment. *"Sir, please find some way to make at least the initial small allotment for our Temple, and God will protect our country."* That drew a laugh from him, but no steel. And yet I knew there was an answer somewhere, and assuredly Bahá'u'lláh would lead us to it. He did, within the hour!

After the fruitless meeting with the Managing Director of SAIL, I was to visit the German Trade Commission to enquire about ceramic tiles for cladding of the lotus petals, as originally planned by Mr. Sahba. A Swedish manufacturer of tiles used in the Sydney Opera House, had submitted samples and quotations. Similar information was to be gathered from

Japanese and German manufacturers for comparison. The office of the German Trade Commission, I was informed, was located on the seventh floor of a building opposite Hindustan Times House, a landmark on Kasturba Gandhi Marg. Reaching Hindustan Times House I found opposite it stood a single-storeyed bungalow, with multi-storeyed buildings on either side. I found parking space and entered the nearest building. No German Trade Commission there. So I walked towards the second building. As I entered it's outer gate I recognized a friend emerging from the building. I stood at the gate, directly in his way. He walked past, seeing but not recognizing me. I called out an ominous "excuse me". He turned about but without a trace of recognition. I could not blame him. We had been acquainted twenty-four years earlier. I called out his name, and he turned around. I approached him with *"Are you not Mr. Ahuja?"* He answered in the affirmative. I repeated, "*Are you not Prem Ahuja?*" and he again so confirmed. *"Then don't you remember me, Prem?" "Your face is familiar, but I am sorry I cannot recall your name"* he replied. So I jogged his memory with hints of Andaman Islands, Port Blair, the year 1956, and suddenly his eyes blazed with recognition. *"Sheriar"* he called out and threw his arms about me. Both of us were genuinely happy over this fortuitous meeting. In 1956 Mr. Ahuja, an accountant in the office of the Accountant General, was deployed to Port Blair to audit government department accounts. That was when I had made a pioneering bid for the Nicobar Islands. It turned out that Mr. Ahuja was currently working with SAIL. He had been Branch Manager in the nearby city of Faridabad, and was transferred to Delhi only since one week. Inscrutable are the ways of God! Standing before me was the solution to our steel problem! Mr. Ahuja confirmed the grim supply situation of steel bars, blaming the erratic power supply that had disrupted and curtailed the process of rolling billets into bars. Excitedly I asked, *"What are billets? Could we get billets? Was it possible to arrange the rolling ourselves?"* Billets, he explained, were 85mm square and six-metre long blocks of steel. Yes, they could be re-rolled even by small factories, into bars of required diameters. He suggested I meet the SAIL Marketing Manager in Calcutta, convey his compliments, and seek allocation of billets. He offered to speak with him and recommend our case.

The following morning found me in Calcutta. The Marketing Manager of SAIL, received me without prior appointment despite his pre-occupations. I briefly apprised him of the Faith, described the Temple project as currently the most significant activity of the Bahá'í world, and stressed on the urgent requirement of steel. He patiently heard me out, but regretted the non-availability of bars. He confirmed billets were available, but added its sale to private consumers was not permitted without clearance of the Iron and Steel Controller. So to the Iron and Steel Controller's office I rushed, secured his clearance with little convincing, and was back at the SAIL office within two hours. The Marketing Manager mused over the situation, identified problems we might face, especially in the area of quality control. I informed him that the factory we had contacted for rolling the billets was licensed by the International Tor-Steel Foundation, which controlled the quality of bars marketed under their trade name. Satisfied on that count, he made a quick phone call somewhere, and then asked the question that was heavenly music to my ears. "*What is the quantity you need immediately?*" I

asked for the release of our total requirement of 1200 tons. That would give SAIL a Rs.2.70 million order during a lean period, and we would benefit from savings on price escalation that would certainly follow. He agreed to the release, handed me the order confirmation and scheduled deliveries to reach Delhi within four weeks.

Next morning the site was agog with the thrilling news, and none was happier than Mr. Sahba. He deputed a team of our and Contractor's engineers to accompany me to nearby Ghaziabad, to finalize the re-rolling contract with M/s. Rathi Udyog Ltd. We hammered out an agreement for re-rolling of the entire quantity of 1200 tons at a fixed rate of Rs.400/- per ton over a three-year period. Also the right to test bars beyond the Indian Standards Institute stipulated two bars per ton was agreed to. Having a completely free hand in testing the re-rolled bars was crucial. In fact, while taking delivery of bars for the shell elements (petals) every bar was subjected to every specified test in the presence of one of our own engineers. This was an additional and crucial advantage we could not have insisted upon SAIL. All terms agreed, and concession secured, a final condition we imposed. Pending the arrival of the first consignment of billets, the immediately needed 96 tons of 40 mm bars for the column foundations be loaned to us. This loan-supply saved the project six weeks time and Rs.150,000/-.

The economics of billets-to-bars operation held out the prospect of a huge saving. The prevailing price of bars of different diameters ranged from Rs.3,600/- to Rs.4,200/- per ton. Billets cost us Rs.2264/- per ton and the re-rolling another Rs.400/- per ton That meant we had our total steel requirement, otherwise impossible to procure, with a saving of about Rs.1000/- per ton, i.e. a saving of Rs.1.20 million at prevailing prices. The price of steel would certainly rise, if for no other reason, than to offset the losses sustained by SAIL during the lean period. The steel crisis and the wisdom of being driven from pillar to post was to earn this rich reward. This was yet another lesson learned in faith and perseverance.

By 1986 the SAIL price of bars had soared to Rs.7,400/- per ton. Our bars had cost us Rs.2,700/- per tonne. Considering an average price over the six year period, a saving of over Rs.3 million was effected. This was the miracle of Bahá'u'lláh. Not for an hour was our construction stalled for want of steel, and there was this massive saving to boot. Had the Divine Hand not arranged the timely transfer of the friendly SAIL manager from Faridabad to Delhi, or not propelled me on the day and exact time to the building from which emerged the new SAIL Branch Manager, not only would our construction have come to a stop indefinitely for want of steel, as had numerous other projects, but we would have lost some Rs.3 million on cost of steel, and also incurred penalties under our agreement with the contractor for failing to supply essential construction materials. These were certainly not coincidences but acts of providence that safeguarded the interests of the Cause. Mr. Sahba decided to plough part of the saving on steel into galvanizing reinforcement bars for the structure of the egg-shell thick petals. The average thickness of the petals being only 12 cm. any rusting of steel bars, over the years, would stain the white concrete shell.

Although the shell was to be clad with marble, Mr. Sahba considered it prudent to take the additional precaution, unprecedented in India, of galvanizing the reinforcement steel.

The Galvanizers Association was thrilled for they saw a whole new field opening up to them. However, when they realized the level of care necessary, they conceded no other project would spend the time or money. They expected the reinforcement bars from the re-rollers to be directly sent for galvanizing, then brought to site, cut and bent, for use. If this were done the protective zinc film on the bent bars would be damaged and cut-ends totally exposed. Thus rust prevention would not be total, and the purpose of galvanizing would be defeated. So the reinforcement bars were first cut and bent at site, and then galvanized. Moreover, the greatest care was exercised during loading, transport and unloading of the galvanized bars to prevent any damage.

Grey Cement

The monotony of chasing water, electricity and steel was broken by concurrently running after cement, another material in desperately short supply. The total quantity of cement manufactured in the country, plus quantities imported by the government, was far short of requirements of the construction industry. Hence the tight control and rationing of cement. The Cement Controller in Delhi allocated quarterly bulk quantities to State governments, which in turn, through their Supply Commissioners, rationed cement to consumers. This was a simple enough system on paper, but rendered ineffective in practice by many factors. Transport was the most critical. For instance, non-availablity of railway wagons or trucks to move cement stocks from factories or ports, often disrupted the whole system. The cumbersome and protracted procurement system was designed to make cement distribution equitable and transparent. However, in practice, the system bred a cadre of liaison agents who, for a fee, facilitated and expedited the allocation process. Prayers, patience, and persuasion helped. Our liaison agent was the Holy Concourse.

Quarterly applications, supported by copies of sanctioned plans, structural engineer’s certificate with slab area and cement usage calculations, etc. were submitted to the Supply Commissioner. The quantum of cement release was on the fixed formula of two bags per square metre area of construction. It did not matter that a particular design specified greater concrete strength requiring higher cement content, such as our's. The Supply Commissioner’s office was inundated with applications, and his office ever crowded with eager applicants.

In pursuit of cement allocations a quarterly pilgrimage to the Supply Commissioner's office was necessary to submit applications, and subsequent visits to follow up movement of our file until it reached the Commissioner himself for final sanction. The follow-up visit after submission of our first application was frustrating. Our file could not be traced. A week later the situation was the same - file not located! Persistent inquiries revealed that rain water had leaked into the room where the files were stored, and all pending files were transferred to a dry room for safe

keeping.

Refusing to be sent away again, I offered to help locate our file. That's when I came to know the *daftardar* - the senior office peon, answerable for almost all that happened or didn't happen in the office. An elderly person, appreciative of the courtesy accorded him, he reluctantly ushered me to the "safe" file storage room, and invited me to start the search. My heart sank at the sight before me. The small room had no furniture, no shelving, no racks. An untidy heap of files, about three feet high, lay littered on the floor. A musty smell of moisture-laden paper pervaded the room. It became immediately clear that if I did not locate our file, nobody else would. The *daftardar* looked at me helplessly, his eyes silently apologetic, his body language distressful over my predicament. So I set to work to find the proverbial needle in the haystack. I waded through the pile of files, some soaking wet, some moist, some dry, until after what appeared the milionth file, I found ours. Happily it was dry. I gave our file to the *daftardar* to place before the concerned officer for processing.

The importance of the *daftardar* was the first lesson learned here. It was he who could accelerate the movement of files. The second lesson was that each future application should be put in our own folder of a distinctive colour that would stand out from among the brown coloured government files. All files submitted thereafter were not only of a distinctive colour and easily recognizable, but for good measure, on the cover we pasted the picture of the Temple model. Tracing our file posed no further problem, for everyone took notice of, and remembered the file with the lotus temple picture.

The anxiety-filled quest for cement was punctuated by a hilarious incident. One cement allotment was overdue. An appointment with the Deputy Supply Commissioner was made to sort things out or work would come to a stop. Allowing for the needed time for the 20 km. drive to his office in Old Delhi, I set out in good time. Cruising down the Outer Ring Road, with sparse traffic on that hot summer afternoon, I was waved to a stop by two policemen. I took out my driver's licence for checking, but they showed no interest in it. I waved the car registration papers. In return they waved a *challan*, the equivalent of a traffic ticket, at me. With righteous indignation I asked what all this was about; complained that they were wasting my time; that I had an important appointment to keep. Firmly, though courteously, they informed me that I had been speeding at 67kph in a 60kph zone, and that I had the choice of either paying a fine there and then, or appearing before a court when summoned. My watch showed I had fifteen minutes to reach my destination. I told the cops I had a very important appointment to keep and preferred to be summoned to court. They pointed to the queue of people before an official seated under a tree beside the road, and said it would be quicker to pay the fine right away than to appear in court. That was sound reasoning, so I relented. Besides if I was a few minutes late, the Dy. Supply Commissioiner would understand. So I joined the speedster gang queue. As each culprit reached the table I heard pronouncements of fines, "Two hundred rupees", "Three hundred rupees", figures rounded off to hundreds of rupees. My turn came. The official took up my "challan". Before he could

pronounce judgement, I placed before him my visiting card, prominent with the Temple picture, and ventured to explain that I was hurrying to meet the Deputy Supply Commissioner and had inadvertently exceeded the speed limit. The official picked up my card gingerly and looked up at me, smiling. Speechless, I kept staring incredulously into the face of the Dy. Supply Commissioner. And then burst out into loud laughter! What was he doing under a roadside tree imposing fines on speeding motorists, when he had given appointments to people like me in his office? He explained, *"We double-up as Honorary Magistrates, as quasi-judicial duties are thrust upon us. I am deputed here today, despite pre-occupations and appointments"*. He looked down at my card again thoughtfully and asked, *"Will Rs.60/ be OK?"* I paid up the fine, but extracted a bargain. Could we have our cement quota without my having to "speed" to his office again? He agreed. We shook hands and laughed again, much to the annoyance of speedsters waiting in the lengthening queue.

The first allotment of 750 tons (15,000 bags) of cement was received in the first quarter of 1980. Into the second quarter, cement became scarcer with lower power supplies to factories. Our application remained pending with the Supply Commissioner with little hope for a regular supply to sustain minimal concreting activity. We were reluctant to accept allocations of imported cement, because transportation over more than a thousand kilometers, from either Bombay or Kandla ports, would almost double the cost. The grave situation compelled us to explore other possibilities. One was to bypass the Supply Commissioner and seek allocations directly from the Cement Controller.

Representations were made to the Deputy Cement Controller and subsequently to the Controller. Repeated visits, presentation of Temple calendars, invitations to Temple site, etc., won sympathetic friends. The Controller and his Deputy, both officers of impeccable integrity, were sympathetic and helpful. A crucial piece of information gleaned from them was that the Industry Minister was authorised to make special allocations to projects out of the discretionary quota given to his ministry. So, could we secure any allocations out of the Minister's quota? We didn’t know the minister, so we turned to Bahá’u’lláh. A formal application was addressed to the Minister. The Dy. Cement Controller penned his strong recommendation, the Controller added his and put it up to the Minister. Bahá’u’lláh granted us a miracle - a regular quarterly allocation of 10,000 bags (500 tons) of cement. This was in addition to allocations from the Supply Commissioner's office. Thus did Bahá’u’lláh make it possible to sustain the project with regular and adequate supplies of cement.

The cement supply situation being as grave as it was, whatever cement was allocated to projects, was generally gratefully accepted and used without demur, irrespective of quality. At the Temple Project every cement consignment, though accompanied by factory test certificates, was tested at site and doubled-checked by tests at independent laboratories.

Grey Stone Aggregate

Next on the procurement agenda, after cement and steel, was the common

grey stone aggregate, available aplenty from Gurukul in Faridabad District of Haryana, barely twenty kilometres from Temple site. The procurement of this basic material was also ridden with problems. However, every problem eventually proved to be a blessing in disguise, and beneficial to the Project. Our Contractor had entered into a one-year, time-bound agreement for the supply of aggragate with a leading supplier. The supplier defaulted, was irregular and unreliable. Upon expiry of the contract period by March-end 1981, we floated fresh tenders. The quotation of M/s Manohar Stone Co., was approved and order placed on them for the total balance requirement of some 36,000 cubic feet of aggregate at the quoted rate. With rising prices it made sense to store at site whatever basic materials could be procured.

The announcement of the 1982 Asian Games in Delhi signalled the spiralling prices of construction materials. The Asiad athletic meet needed basic infrastructure like stadia, swimming pools, a sports village to accommodate the thousands of competitors, new link roads, flyovers, and a dozen five-star hotels. Commencement of these constructions created a spurt in demand for materials, and prices soared. The rate agreed with M/s Manohar Stone Co. was Rs.275/- per 100 cubic feet for the supply of 36,000 cubic feet of aggregate, but we had no iron-clad legal agreement to hold them to.They had merely signed and accepted our order. When the price of aggregate rose beyond Rs.300/- Mr. Manoharlal called, fishing for a rate increase. He was followed days later by his sons, first Ashok and then Naresh, his sons, seeking a rate hike. Each in turn was encouraged to continue supplies at the agreed rate since their stone-crushing cost had not risen and their profit margin remained the same. They were moreover assured that by serving the Temple, their family would be amply blessed with spiritual rewards. This was said in all sincerity and not merely as a ruse to prey upon their religious sentiments. I cannot say they were convinced, but they did respond to the encouragement and continued with supplies despite ever-rising rates.

Early one morning I had a call from Mr.Manoharlal. I was struggling with a serious site problem and in no mood to reason with him. I started telling him he was free to stop supplies whenever he wished, but he interrupted me. He wasn’t asking for a rate increase. He kept repeating excitedly, *"Mr. Sheriar I now believe what you have been telling us about aashirwad – blessings. I believe. I believe"*. What on earth had happened? He explained that his elder son Ashok had been knocked over by a bus in busy Connaught Place. His motorcycle was crushed and he was taken in unconscious condition to hospital. For twenty-four hours his whereabouts were unknown. Only after regaining consciousness could he be identified and the anxious family informed. And how was Ashok now? *"Discharged from hospital and absolutely all right. And that's not the only miracle"* Manoharlal chuckled. *"Ashok was carrying Rs.30,000/- cash in his pocket and the entire amount was returned to him."* Indeed rare that all the cash carried by a patient admitted in an unconscious condition to a public hospital is returned to him! This was Bahá’u’lláh's compensation to a Hindu family for their services to His Mashriqu’l-Adhkár .

Phone calls and pleas to raise aggregate prices ceased, although rates continued to soar. Manohar Stone Co. fulfilled their commitment and more.

They continued supplies beyond the contracted quantity and now it was my turn to phone and ask them to submit bills at prevailing rates. With one accord, they said, *"Whatever rate you decide will be accepted by us".* They happily accepted a 30% rate increase as per current market rates. Mr. Manoharlal and his sons proudly tell the world the Bahá'í Temple is built with their aggregate.

White Stone Aggregate

The problem of procuring grey cement, I disovered to my utter dismay, was child's play compared with sourcing white cement, white sand and white aggregate for concreting the Temple superstructure. The Contractor faced serious problems when asked to produce sample cubes and panels of white concrete for tests. White cement, for the samples was available, but no white aggregate or white sand. They procured a truck-load of river-bed pebbles for use as coarse aggregate, but no white sand. The aggregate was more grey than white, hence rejected by Mr. Sahba. White cement too posed a serious problem because the combined production of the only two manufacturers in the country could not meet our requirement. The Contractor was ready to throw in the trowel, and white concreting was about to be aborted. However, having come to believe that for every Temple problem a solution existed somewhere, we had only to seek, for Bahá'u'lláh has assured: *"We have assigned to every end a means for its accomplishment; avail yourselves thereof, and place your trust and confidence in God, the Omniscient, the All-Wise."*

White stone aggregate was the first object of our search. Enquiries with terrazzo tile manufacturers as to the source of white stone chips used in tiles, led us through the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Haryana in December 1980. Chhota Udaipur, in Baroda District of Gujarat, produced a compact, dense, slightly off-white stone, with high crushing strength. I obtained samples and rates, but was not convinced of the ability of the factories to crush and grade the stone to our stringent specifications. The other deterrent was the exorbitant transport cost over the 1000 km distance to Delhi. Enquiries at Baroda led us to Udaipur, a mining town in Rajasthan.

Udaipur district produced dolomite, a white stone with good crushing qualities and high strength. Also the factories here were better equipped. Udaipur therefore was a second possible source of white aggregate. We extended our search to Alwar, another mining town in Rajasthan, much closer to Delhi, which also produced dolomite. Solution of the white aggregate problem appeared at hand. Samples and quotations were taken from prospective suppliers for the consideration of Mr. Sahba.

A still nearer source of white aggregate located, only 40km from Delhi, in Gurgaon, Haryana, was a hillock of quartzite. The colour and strength of the stone were approved, but quarrying it needed government permission from the office of the Directorate of Industries in distant city of Chandigarh. So to Chandigarh by an overnight bus journey. At the Directorate of Industries we were told that for quarrying the rock we needed to buy a mining lease from Government, and also that quartzite was designated as a major mineral and not permitted for use in construction. However, the Director in charge

of mines, noting that the stone was required for a temple construction and not for commercial purposes, suggested we can extract the needed hundred or two hundred truck-loads of rock without formal permission. He even offered to instruct his Deputy in Gurgaon to render us all assistance. We expressed our appreciation and gratitude to the Director, but regretted we could not avail of his kind offer because we did not wish to bypass or violate mining rules or any prevailing laws. So, although quartzite was the preferred stone, Mr. Sahba decided to use dolomite from Alwar. The reputed mine-owners of Alwar, M/s Ramnarayan Brothers, were entrusted with this operation, for which they installed a special sieve to grade and separate sizes of crushed dolomite in accordance with our specifications. The first basic material for white concrete was thus sourced. So, on to the search for white sand and white cement!

White Sand

Pit sand occurs in an area of several square kilometers bordering Delhi and Haryana, called the Bhatti mines. The land belonged to Government, of which portions were leased to individuals and companies for sand extraction. Generally lease holders in turn sub-let pits to small labour contractors and collected royalty on a truck-load basis. In these pits natural deposits of sand are found in wide bands or layers, ranging in colour from brick-red to a light orange. It is not unusual to see layers of different colours snaking across a single pit. The pits vary in depth from two metres to perhaps thirty metres. Every pit is a bee-hive of activity from early morning. Crow-bar and pick-axe wielding men dig out the sand, women load sand in bags on donkeys, boys drive the donkeys up to the pit-head, where the sand is shovelled into waiting trucks for despatch to constructions sites.

A trek through the entire wind-swept, dusty mining area, even beyond Bhatti into the Manghar mines of Haryana, yielded no white sand. Enquiries with lease-holders, contractors, truck drivers, labourers, elicited no positive response. An old watchman mentioned about having heard of white sand occurring in a distant pit leased to somebody named Jhangi Ram. The pits bearing no names or numbers for identification, it was not easy to locate "*Jhangi Ram ki khan*"- Jhangi Ram's mine. After hours of aimless trekking, following the directions of all and sundry, I came upon two abandoned pits, which a passing labourer thought belonged to Jhangi Ram. No other pits were being worked in the immediate neighbourhood. These two circular pits, perhaps eight to ten metres in diameter, and quite shallow, had not been worked for long. The pits, no different from others in appearance, had a meter deep overburden of brown-red earth, under which appeared sand deposits. Entering the pit I scraped away at the pit wall with a broken pick-axe handle lying there. Behind the dust layer, the sand colour became lighter and gradually brought to light a layer of crystalline, sugary-white sand. This was exactly what we needed, but would this pit yield our total requirement? How deep and wide was this layer? Repeated scraping and digging in other locations in the pit yielded the same result, indicating the first was not an isolated patch, and raising hopes of a reliable source. Thanks to the Holy Concourse! A kerchief full of the sand was taken back for tests.

Mr. Sahba was thrilled with the quality and colour of the sand. So Jhangi Ram had to be located. If we failed, the alternative was to order white silica sand of the quality used in the ceramic industry, from distant Jaipur at exorbitant cost. It did not take much sleuthing to locate Jhangi Ram. Enquiries at the office of the Mining Engineer revealed that Jhangi Ram had briefly worked the pits, had defaulted in payment to the Department and was not permitted to contintue operations. Where could he be contacted? Nobody knew. In that vast, desolate expanse of dry, broken terrain, the government had recently constructed tenements for migrant labour, and named it Sanjay Gandhi Labour Camp, in memory of the late son of Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. That is where we located Jhangi Ram. Rates and terms were negotiated, and he was advanced the sum he owed the mines department to resume operations. Soon the specially constructed bins at site began to fill with sugary white crystalline sand. White aggregate and white sand sourced, the third ingredient for white concreting to be sourced was white cement.

White Cement

There were only two white cement manufacturers in India in 1981, whose total production barely met the requirements of mosaic tile and paint manufacturers. They expressed regret saying they would have to starve their regular customers for fully six months to meet our requirement. The alternative was to scout for imported white cement. Rates and details of chemical composition, colour consistency, test certificates, etc. were obtained from European, Japanese and Korean sources. Korean cement, manufactured and marketed by Ssangyong Corporation, was approved by Mr. Sahba. Rate for the supply of 20,000 bags was negotiated and agreed at an all-inclusive rate, delivered in Bombay, over a two year period. The fixed rate agreement protected us from all escalation, whether in the cost of cement, freight, or insurance. The prevailing cost of Indian white cement was Rs.220/- per bag, whereas Korean cement was landed at Temple site at Rs.107/- per bag, resulting in a net saving of Rs.2.26 million. But before we could count the saving, ways had to be found around the prevailing import restrictions.

In order to tide the country over the acute cement shortage, Government was importing commonly used grey cement through its agency, the State Trading Corporation - STC. Import of white cement was unprecedented. However, the STC agreed to import for us as a special case, on condition of payment of their overhead charges and customs duty, amounting to almost Rs.1.50 million. Could we save that sum? Bahá'u'lláh showed us the way.

During consultations with STC officials to settle import details, we insisted on certain guarantees which they could not fulfil. We needed a minimum of one thousand tons, but not in a single consignment. Concreting of the lotus petals would be spread over two years. As cement could not be stored over such a long period without losing strength, imports needed to be staggered in small consignments to match our construction programme. Guarantees were also sought for consistency of colour and quality of each consignment. The STC, unable to meet these conditions expressed their inability to import our requirement and obliged us with a letter of regret.

Armed with the STC refusal, we applied to the Ministry of Commerce for permission to import white cement ourselves. The Universal House of Justice approved of channelising the cement purchase through the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Korea. This enabled us to represent with Government that the cement was a donation towards the Temple project, and that scarce foreign exchange was not being expended on the import. Securing the necessary import licence, we applied for exemption from customs duty to the Ministry of Finance. The Chairman of the Central Board of Customs and Excise, after some close questioning, agreed to waive all customs duty, but cautioned, *"I don't want the market flooded with white cement!"* There had been a recent scandal when a consignment of grey cement, gifted to another organization, had been clandestinely sold. To allay his fears and remove all doubts we offered to pay the salary of any person the Ministry appointed, to monitor, at Temple site, the use of the imported cement. That more than convinced the officials. Their appreciation soared when, having effected a saving on cement usage, we did not avail of our total import licence, and surrendered the last one hundred tons. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Korea and Ssangyong Corporation co-ordinated timely shipments convenient to our construction schedule. Thus did Bahá'u'lláh make it possible to cast those delicate, egg-shell-thick petals of our exquisite lotus, in white concrete of matchless quality and strength.

Marble

Mr. Sahba had originally designed the petals to be clad with white ceramic tiles, as in the Sydney Opera building. Such tiles being unavailable in India, imported tiles had to be sourced. The Swedish firm which had supplied tiles for the Sydney Opera, offered the same tiles and sent samples. However, noting that all famous Indian temples were embellished with rich statuary in stone and marble, and that the use of tiles was incompatible with the high standard of Indian religious architecture, Mr.Sahba decided to switch to marble. His initial reluctance was because the change involved design alterations, additional costs, and approval of the Universal House of Justice, but was eventually convinced after study of feasibility and comparative cost study that, for a nominally higher price, marble was preferable to ceramic tiles. The cost study was on the premise that Indian marble would be used or if marble was imported, the exorbitant 200% customs duty would be waived. Mr. Sahba submitted the comparative cost study and explanations to the Universal House of Justice and their gracious permission for marble usage was soon forthcoming. That was the needed signal. If that infallible Supreme Body approved the change, then nothing could prevent it.

Mr.Sahba's preference being for Indian marble, enquiries were floated for 10,000 square metres of first grade quality white marble from the famous Makrana mines of Rajasthan. The response was promising. Reliable suppliers were interviewed, including the biggest mine owner. Through the clarifications and negotiations process it became obvious that prospective suppliers had paid scant attention to our stringent specifications and conditions. Or they had taken for granted that, as was customary, specifications would be relaxed or diluted. When the inflexibility of our

conditions and specifications was underscored, even the most confident tenderers faltered. None could guarantee constancy of colour and quality, and wavered over the penalties for failing to meet delivery schedules. What drove away even the most confident, was meeting the accuracy criteria of the complex geometry and smooth double-curvatured surfaces of marble slabs to exactly match the geometry of the concrete petals. Although Indian stone-masons are among the best in the world and highly reputed for the intricacy and delicacy of their craft, maintaining uniformity and adhering to geometry was not their forte. Daunted and disappointed, all suppliers shied away. That left us no alternative but to import the marble. And who could choose a better stone, or entrust marble work to a more reliable agency than had done Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice during construction of the monumental buildings at the Bahá'í World Centre? So Mr. Sahba opted for the marble from Mount Pentelikon, Greece, the same quality of marble used in the Parthenon monument, parts of which have survived natural ravages of many centuries. And the marble work was to be entrusted to Count Paolo Marzotto of Industria Marmi Vincentini of Verona, Italy, who had carried out all the elaborate and intricate work on the buildings in Haifa.

Prevailing import regulations permitted religious organizations to receive gifts in cash and kind from foreign donors. The offer of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Italy of the total quantity of marble made it possible for us to receive this gift. Necessary permission from the Ministry of Commerce was obtained. However, as the cladding change was contingent upon the 200% customs duty exemption, it was imperative to obtain that concession. We called upon the Holy Concourse for help.

Authority to grant exemption from customs duty was vested in the Chairman of the Central Board of Customs and Excise in the Ministry of Finance. Our application, with copy of the offer of marble donation from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Italy, was submitted with a plea for early approval to enable us to arrange timely procurement of needed marble. The grant of exemption from customs duty was unprecedented, and it took the department time to approve the exemption. The Divine Hand was with us. The exemption was granted, and the major hurdle crossed brought immense relief and joy to all at site. A jubilant Mr. Sahba rushed off to Italy to finalize the marble contract with Marmi Vincentini.

A fortnight after receipt and study of technical drawings an Italian expert, Engr. Danda, accompanied by Mr. Sohrab Youssefian, a resident Bahá'í of Italy, arrived in Delhi for an on-the-spot study and consultations with Mr. Sahba and Mr. Ashraf. At that juncture the first of the nine arches had been concreted. Engr. Danda spent a week measuring and studying it, to finalise an appropriate cladding design. Mr. Sahba co-ordinated this intricate work with the office of Dr. Flint in London and Marmi Vincentini in Italy. Two more trips of the Italian experts to Delhi and a final visit to Italy by Mr. Sahba, produced the cladding design that has captured the imagination of Temple visitors.

Description could fill a book of the quarrying of huge marble blocks from

Mt. Pentelikon in Greece; their shipment to Verona in Italy; their being cut into slabs of required thickness, and curvatured by computer-controlled machines to an exact geometry; their preliminary assembly and inspection; the marking and initialing of each approved panel; and their eventual packing and shipment to India. Suffice it to say that no closer supervisory system could have been devised to ensure that everything was absolutely right. No risks could be incurred. Consignments of trapezoid shaped marble panels cut, curvatured, polished and numbered for fitting in place like pieces of a giant jig-saw puzzle, were carefully packed in specially designed crates with generous quantities of protective foam layers. The stringent constraints imposed by import and customs rules permitted the import of 9000 square metres of marble, and nothing more under any circumstances. It did not matter to the authorities if the marble was of the right quality and colour, whether the panels were correctly curvatured and of suitable sizes, or whether they arrived in sound or broken condition. If anything went wrong it was irreversible. The marble received could not be rejected or exchanged. Hence the greatest care went into this operation. The closely checked and approved marble crates were loaded in containers for maximum safety, and ferried to Bombay by Lloyd Triestino in their Holsten ships.

The first consignment arrived in July 1983, when I was in Bombay convalescing after a heart attack. Clearing the marble consignment was an adventure. Although an agency was employed to arrange the clearing and forwarding of the cargo, every step was closely monitored by us, lest any procedural hitch or mishandling caused serious problems. The shipping papers with all cargo details, were filed for scrutiny of the Assistant Collector of Customs in Bombay. We encountered our first problem there.

A vigilant, perhaps over-zealous, customs officer noted that though our licence permitted import of marble in units of square metres, the supplier's invoice showed quantities in terms of "M.Q." units. I explained that MQ in Italian perhaps meant square metres. Not satisfied, he demanded to know exactly what MQ stood for. So to the Italian Consulate I rushed. An official confirmed MQ was short for "Metri Quadrati"- square metres! I dared request for an official translation, to which the Italian guffawed! Only after being explained the situation did he relent. With the official translation of MQ, we overcame the first hurdle in marble customs clearance.

The shipping papers approved, the cargo was subject to examination. From among the sea of containers scattered in the dockyard, at ground level or stacked two-high, we located ours. In order to facilitate and expedite the examination process, with the co-operation of the heavy crane operators and fork-lift drivers, we had our containers lowered to ground level and grouped together as closely as space permitted. The sealed containers were opened and the customs inspector marked random crates he wished to examine. The marked crates were opened, and the marble slabs exposed for inspection. And here we faced our second problem.

The trapezoid marble panels were not of uniform dimensions, making the area calculation difficult. If the slabs were rectangular and of uniform size,

area calculation was simple. Moreover, as was the universal system of measurement, the invoiced area was for rectangular slabs out of which trapezoids were cut. Thus the actual area of finished slabs was less, the difference being the wastage margin. Customs authorities wanted to take into account the invoiced area and we insisted on actual area measurements. Convinced by our explanations, with diagrams and model calculations, the Inspectors learned to trust us. The experience gained and the rapport built with docks and customs officials, eased the clearance of subsequent consignments. Examinations over, the marble crates were loaded in trucks and despatched to Delhi.

All marble consignments were insured for full replacement value, from the moment of dispatch from Marmi Vincentini until delivery at Temple site. As additional precaution for safe delivery, Bahá'í youth volunteers from Bombay accompanied trucks to ensure drivers drove carefully, and took no risks on the three-day journey to Delhi. And what a glorious sight it was when a convoy of trucks arrived at site with their precious cargo. Not until every crate was safely unloaded did we breathe easy. The transport operation too was not without anxiety. Incredibly, we lost a truck!

One consignment was loaded on seven trucks and dispatched from Bombay. Six trucks arrived in Delhi on schedule. Arrival of the seventh truck, unaccompanied by a Bahá'í youth volunteer, was awaited. A delay of half a day or even a day was not unusual. Anxiety turned to alarm when after two days there was no trace of the truck. Frantic calls were made to the branch offices of the transport agent in towns and cities en-route. No breakdown or accident was reported. Three days, and still no news of the truck. It had vanished into thin air with eight crates of our precious marble! Where could we start looking for a truck along a 1200 km highway? And when all hope was almost given up, the truck arrived on the sixth day, happily with the cargo intact. There had been no accident, no breakdown, no hold-up! The driver had a simple explanation! It was *rakshabandhan* day when he was near his native village and he could not drive past without making a detour to visit his family for a few hours. Seeing him after many months, his family had prevailed upon him to extend his stay. *Rakshabandhan* is an annual Hindu festival, when gift-bearing brothers visit their sisters. And sisters tie a ritual thread on the brothers' wrists, as a sign of dependence on them for protection. The driver had missed this festive occasion since several years and being in the vicinity of his village, he could not miss the opportunity. So he had pleased his family, especially his sister, by his surprise visit. And there being no communication facility he had been unable to inform anybody. So what if he was three days overdue?

Silicone Sealant

Cladding the lotus petals posed an unexpected problem. If marble panels were embedded with mortar on the concrete petals, as was traditionally done, there was the risk of marble cracking due to differential rates of expansion and contraction of the concrete shells and marble panels. The concrete petals, with dense steel reinforcement, were liable to greater expansion and contraction movements than marble panels in the extreme climate of Delhi. This differential would damage the marble. Dry cladding,

unprecedented in India, was recommended by a French consultant.

Dry cladding meant suspending marble panels above the concrete shells with stainless steel anchors, with open joints between panels to allow free expansion and contraction movements between panels and also concrete shell. The joints needed to be filled with a material that was water-resistant and elastic, so as to be able to accomodate marble panel movements. Such a material was silicone sealant, a product unknown in India. A Bombay based multi-national corporation was located which had newly arranged with a French manufacturer to import and market this product in India. They provided us with samples for conducting trials. Tests carried out over four seasons, found the material satisfactory. To place orders for the product, we were asked to route the order through the company's Delhi office, which surprisingly knew nothing of the product. So we decided to import the material ourselves. Again the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Italy stepped in with their generous offer of the entire quantity of sealant. The necessary import licence and duty exemption were secured, and the material imported from Italy. But not without problems!

Silicone sealant is packed in cylindrical plastic tubes, which are placed in the chamber of a dispenser with a trigger-controlled mechanism. Pressure brought on the tube by pressing the trigger squeezes out the sealant, like tooth-paste from a tube. In trade terms, the tube is called a cartridge, and the dispenser is called a gun. That was the description of the cargo in the shipping documents submitted to the Customs Office for clearing the shipment. When several days elapsed without our documents being cleared, I visited the customs office. An irate Asstt. Collector of Customs confronted me with wild accusations of hiding behind the garb of religion and engaging in militancy; about being traitors engaged in arms smuggling, and the like. His tirade concluded with threats to have me arrested and to confiscate our cargo. I was bewildered. There had to be some misunderstanding, for there was absolutely no ground for the baseless allegations. *"May I please know the reason for these accusations Sir"* I enquired. His angry response was: *"Don't pretend to be innocent. You know well what I mean. You call yourself a religious organisation, and you want to import guns and cartridges? Why do you need guns and cartridges?"* In a flash everything cleared up. "Operation Bluestar", the entry of Indian troops into the Sikh Golden Temple at Amritsar was fresh in all minds. The media had been full of accounts of the goings-on within those sacred precincts, the arms and ammunitions stocked and distributed from that safe haven by militants, and the final army assault resulting in many deaths. That happened in late 1984, and here we were, barely three months later, importing "guns and cartridges" in the name of the Bahá'í Temple! The Asstt. Collector's anger and outraged feelings were assuaged by agreeing with him completely that religion was not to be used for furthering political ends; that the purpose of religion was to unite hearts and to harmonize aspirations of peoples, nations and races. Then, with photographs, the method of marble cladding of our Temple building and the need to seal the marble joints was explained, as also the nomenclarture of guns and cartridges relating to silicone sealant packaging. The Asstt. Collector was embarrassed to learn that our imported "gun" was nothing more than a dispenser, like a grease-gun familiar to

every car owner, and our "cartridges" were ordinary tubes filled with sealant. He stared incredulously at me in silence. I invited him to personally examine the cargo and be convinced. He sent an inspector with me to bring samples for verification. Within two hours thereafter, our papers were cleared by an apologetic Asstt. Collector, and the issue was laughed away.

SITE MOBILIZATION

The three month mobilization period, May to July 1980, was spent in ground preparations. The Contractor had to assemble a construction team, familiarize engineers with construction plans, arrange for necessary equipment, employ all categories of labour, build temporary offices, staff and labour facilities, and generally be in readiness to commence construction from day one of the agreed construction period. As clients, we had to arrange for electricity and water, provide government-controlled steel and cement, and basic construction material like stone aggregate and sand. Mr. Sahba also had to put together his site team of architects and engineers, familiarise them with building plans, and allot them supervisory duties. He also appointed a quantity surveyor, accountant and book keeper, office secretary and a peon. Responsibilities allotted to me included fund-raising and finances, materials procurement and imports, legal and labour matters, dealing with government and statutory authorities. Mr. Sahba's Associate Architect and chief designer, Mr Mashiyat Ashraf, joined the site team in 1982.

The site handed over to the Contractor was a barren, rock-strewn estate with a hundred metre wide bowl gouged out at its western end. Upon a mound in the centre of the bowl stood the Temple foundation stone, radiating from which were series of foundation pits of different dimensions. The general excavation for the basement and foundations was carried out by another contractor one year earlier. The site wore a desolate look, with hot dry summer winds churning up the dust into thick clouds, making the area quite inhospitable. Four workers of two tube-well contractors lived at site in a tent.

The vanguard of ECC work-force arrived three weeks after award of the contract. The small group, under the direction of a charge-hand, settled in with their families in make-shift huts. Work began on two fronts under the supervision of two engineers – infrastructure construction and site survey. One marked out facilities to serve as site offices, storage godowns, etc., while the other carried out accurate survey of the excavations carried-out earlier, marked the final positions of foundations, established bench-marks for future reference, and marked out exact locations of the Main and Ancillary Buildings. While the survey team was busy with measurements and markings, work commenced on construction of offices and godowns. Truck-loads of construction material arrived at site, followed by steel trusses, timber for door and window frames, sanitary and electrical fittings, etc. And the buildings gradually rose. Lack of water and electricity hampered the work. Water was brought in tankers. All the electricity we had was a one-kilowatt load, which sufficed for limited illumination.

Mid-July of 1980 saw the completion of the site offices, storage godowns, labour hutments, canteen, crèche and school. The site office building, a rectangular structure with offices on either side of a central passage along its length, was shared with the Contractor. Our half comprised offices of Project Manager, Mr. Sahba, his team of architects, engineers and supervisors, accounts and secretarial staff and the National Spiritual Assembly representative - yours truly. The offices were furnished appropriately and air-conditioned. The Contractor's and our team moved in by mid-July.

The site came to life with the arrival of a second wave of labourers comprising some eighty families, children and all. This labour force manually trimmed and deepened the foundation pits as finally marked out by the survey team. The work was so divided that men did the heavier work of excavation and breaking up of hard rock with crow-bars and heavy hammers, while women removed excavated material from the pits in baskets or head-loads. Where the pits were deep with steep sides, bamboo step-ladders were improvised. On the rungs of the ladder sat workers, receiving from the pit bottom an excavated boulder or basket of rock, passing it over the head to the worker on the rung above, and so on until it reached the top. By July-end 1980 seven sets of nine pits of different dimensions and depths radiated from the centre, ready to receive concrete.

Unexpected delays in handing over the just completed Maharashtra Legislative Assembly building in Bombay, prevented the designated ECC Project Manager, Mr. Aggarwal, from assuming his responsibility. His second-in-command Mr. Ganapathy Tilak took charge. This development was providential. Mr. Tilak proved his capability and commitment as an honest, and experienced engineer, enjoying the respect of his staff, and with whom we established excellent rapport. His crowning virtue was that he was deeply religious, a practicing Hindu. Hence building the Temple had a very special significance for him. It was unthinkable that Mr.Tilak would start a day's work without prayers or that he would allow a new operation to commence without a regular 'pooja'. It was not unusual that he was also guided by his astrologer. The first three momentous events for Mr. Tilak were the first concrete pour, the submission of his first bill, and receipt of his first payment. Accordingly, the most auspicious day and time for the first concrete pour was determined by him to be 11 a.m. on 30th. July 1980. I vividly recall the submission of his first bill. Holding it reverently with both hands, he raised it to his forehead, and handed it over with the request for payment only on the tenth day, and that, after 12 noon. So firm was he that, when offered earlier payment, he declined until the propitious hour.

SOWING THE SEED

30th July 1980, when the first foundation concrete was poured, was the second red-letter day in the history of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, after laying of the foundation stone by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum on 17th October 1977. That July morning the sky was overcast. Threatening monsoon clouds cleared as friends gathered about the foundation pit readied for concreting.

One of the contractor's engineers was heard to say: *"We should have a shower of rain as a token of God's blessing"*. And soon enough we did. There was a sudden cloudburst that drenched those who didn't run fast enough for shelter. But soon the sun smiled again upon that hallowed spot, and the assemblage. That was certainly a good augury. Mr. Tilak and his staff joined the Bahá'ís at the pit. Our consultants, Mr. Mahendra Raj, and Mr. Deolalikar were present. Then arrived Counsellor Mrs. Zena Sorabjee with National Assembly Secretary, Mr. Ramnik Shah.

The foundation pit was surrounded by a five-deep circle of people. In India no auspicious occasion starts without a *pooja* ceremony, when prayers are recited, followed by a coconut breaking ritual, and concludes with the distribution of *prasad* - pieces of broken coconuts and sweetmeat. Hearts turned heaven-ward and voices rose in praise and thanksgiving. Mr. Tilak led the prayers with a Sanskrit chant. The carpentry foreman, Mr. Shivram Singh, recited a Sikh prayer; concreting foreman Mr. Chandrashekhar chanted a Tamil prayer. Bahá'í prayers followed, in Persian, Arabic, English, and Hindi. Devotionals gave way to the traditional breaking of coconuts. The senior consultant, Mr. Mahendra Raj, broke the first coconut, followed by the contractor's staff and Bahá'ís, and sprinkled the water in and around the foundation pit. The broken coconuts were shelled and cut into pieces to be served as *prasad*.

The coconut-breaking and clapping over, came the moment all awaited. Two women-workers appeared bearing head-loads of concrete. Much to her surprise, I invited Mrs. Golnar Sahba to step forward, and in her hands I placed a new trowel. She poured the first trowel-full of concrete into the foundation of the first of the nine innermost basement columns. Others followed, amid clapping and cries of Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá. In that foundation pit was placed a small plastic container of rose petals from the Holy Shrines, gifted by recent pilgrim-friends from Bombay. Another cloudburst sent everybody scurrying for shelter.

I stood rooted to that spot, the rain drops mingling with my tears. Mr. Tilak took the sudden second shower as another good omen. As the friends melted away, I lingered until concreting of the pit was complete. The Temple was born! The moment of birth of the eighth Bahá'í House of Worship was so emotion-filled and overwhelming that I sobbed uncontrollably. How many the eyes that had witnessed the auspicious birth of such an institution of Bahá'u'lláh , so potent as to influence the spiritual destiny of nations and continents? That historic moment signified a great and glorious step in the onward march of the Cause of God. It was a moment when one called to mind all the dear believers in the far distant towns and villages, whose devotion and sacrifice had made the occasion possible; a moment to marvel at the far-sightedness of the early Indian believers, who, sixty years earlier, had petitioned Abdu'l-Bahá for permission to build a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár; a moment to count one's blessings and call to mind the distress and on-going persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran.

In that instant one felt the presence of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum and the many esteemed Hands of the Cause who had blessed India with their

footsteps. One imagined the rejoicing, in the spiritual realms, of great teachers of the cause in India, like Jamal Effendi, Martha Root, Dorothy Baker, Mr. Faizi, and Dr. Muhajir. Indeed the Holy Concourse rejoiced in that glorious moment. Volumes of words cannot adequately express the gamut of thoughts that filled that pregnant moment, or to describe the stirring within one's soul. It was amazing how a single moment could contain such a diversity of thoughts and feelings of bliss, gratitude, praise, humility, remorse, and awesome indebtedness. Coming to mind also was grief over the passing of Hand of the Cause of God Dr. Adelbert Muhlschlegel, news of which was received that very morning. Overriding all thoughts and emotions was the feeling of the presence of our dearly loved Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, who initiated the process of continental Mashriqu'l-Adhkár building. Memorable and joyous as the occasion was, my joy was incomplete. Mr. Ardeshir Rustompur, the greatest benefactor of the Temple, could not be present due to ill-health. And Mr. Sahba was away in London for consultations with Dr. Flint, our structural engineer.

Seeing the last of the friends off, I drafted a telex message to our beloved Universal House of Justice to convey the news of the first construction step taken, and to seek their blessings for the Project. Their immediate gracious response was deeply stirring.

"*Rejoice news commencement construction Mashriqu'l-Adhkár heart Indian sub-continent. This achievement is in sharp contrast sad happenings cradle Faith and will be source delight believers all lands. Supplicating Sacred Threshold that Temple of Light will soon become instrument radiate divine guidance illumine hearts of the multitudes. May Bahá'ís of India arise to meet responsibilities render utmost assistance raising this beautiful edifice in the Name of Bahá'u'lláh.*"

My heart brimmed over with joy that night. The following lines came to mind.

The day dawned bright that auspicious morn,
July thirtieth when the Temple was born,
Bahapur was ready, believers were there,
With joy in their hearts, on their lips a prayer,
The Holy Concourse rejoiced in the realms up above,
And blessed that sacred spot with a shower of love.

On the following day the site was alive with the chugging of diesel motors operating concrete mixers, and the graceful movement of women bearing head-loads of concrete from the mixers to foundation pits. Concreting operations, closely supervised by our enineers proceeded apace. The trimming, cleaning and preparation of foundation pits continued. Each pit was excavated until hard rock was reached, irrespective of depths. Interestingly, the rock stratification was not uniform, and in some pits where layers of soft micaceous rock appeared, excavation was deepened until hard rock was reached. The foundation pits from which would rise the main load-bearing columns of the arches were excavated to depths of above seven metres. One pit, readied for concreting, was being swept out to receive concrete. Our supervisor pointed out a tiny vein of brown earth,

perhaps 20mm. wide, and ordered it to be cleaned. A labourer scratched out the earth wedged between two rock layers with a stick. Deeper and deeper went the stick until it broke, and the earth was not all out of the crevice. He took a length of steel bar, and deeper and deeper went the bar and it soon became apparent that the layer of earth extended much deeper. One big heave with a crow-bar wedged in the crevice, and the rock outcropping gave way, revealing a large, soft, almost spongy micaceous layer. Concreting was stayed and excavation continued endlessly, deeper and wider, until the micaceous material was all removed. That experience called for extra caution before signing-off other pits for concreting. As a result, actual excavation quantity doubled, and the contractor fell behind schedule from here on. The total excavation, carried out manually was of the order of 4000 cubic metres, enough rock to build a metre-high wall, 30cm. wide and twelve kilometers long - the distance between Temple site and Bahá'í Centre.

With steady progress in foundation concreting through August, September and October of 1980, we emerged from the pits to ground level. In late August total stoppage of work loomed large over the site because of non-availability of steel for foundations. But steel became miraculously available and work proceeded unhindered. Cut, bent and tied in place, the heavy 40mm bars for foundations of the main load-bearing columns made massive underground steel cages. The Contractor's engineers were heard to remark that the building was over-designed and excessive steel was being used. The imagined excessive steel used was to ensure the structural reliability and safety of the building against the severest eartquakes experienced in Delhi over the last century.

Sanctioned Plans

Three months into the construction I was prompted to check what rules were to be observed at construction sites, to make sure we were not in default of any. The first rule of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) stipulated that plans sanctioned by DDA were to be displayed and made available at site for inspection by visiting officials. This being the contractor's responsibility, I checked out with ECC construction manager. Mr. Tilak admitted he was unaware of DDA rules, and in any case he had no sanctioned plans. Neither had Mr. Sahba, nor the National Spiritual Assembly. Apparently we were blissfully unaware that construction was proceeding without officially approved plans. Mr. Sahba had secured approval of plans by the Urban Arts Commission, which was concerned only with aesthetics and environment. Acknowledgement of receipt of plans submitted for sanction to DDA was on file, but no record of sanction.

So to the DDA I rushed. Our file could not be located. The numbered cabinet pigeon hole which should have held our file was empty. After a frantic search our file was found on top of the cabinet, gathering dust over six months. Our fatter-than-usual file, containing some twenty blue prints and other documents, didn't fit into the regular pigeon-hole slot, so a DDA clerk had placed it on top of the cabinet and forgotten about it. The file traced, it was placed before the concerned officer. He was apologetic and insisted on paying the prescribed temple-plan-approval fee of Re1/- as penance for

delay! He stamped and signed the plans as approved. We were now in compliance with DDA rules.

THE LOTUS TAKES ROOT

While foundation concreting progressed, fabrication commenced of timber shutters that would give the basement columns the desired fair-faced finish, i.e. concrete surfaces requiring no plaster or paint. The ECC concrete technologist and carpenters spent four months experimenting with different concrete mix designs, formwork, release agents and vibration techniques. They cast numerous samples of columns and panels until they produced the finishes acceptable to Mr. Sahba. The two finishes approved were a smooth, joint-free finish for the innermost basement columns, and a timber-textured finish for the remaining columns. The former required fibre-glass lining to cover the formwork joints, and rough sawn timber to impart a natural texture to the concrete surface, for the latter.

With all materials at hand, concreting techniques devised for special finishes, and the augmentation of the labour force, progress of work distinctly spurted. A jungle of steel rapidly sprouted with the tying in place of wire-brushed, rust-free column reinforcement steel. Accuracy of column positions doubly checked, approved formwork was positioned around the bars, adequately secured, aligned and readied for concreting, but not before signing off of a list of a host of checks by our vigilant architects and engineers. A jointly-signed check-list ensured all materials were of approved quality and in sufficient quantities; all equipment was tested and in running order, with spares in case of break-downs; manpower was adequate for completion of the operation; et al. Concreting proceeded only after the check-list was finally signed off by Mr. Sahba, and of course, after a brief ‘pooja’ – invocation of God’s blessings, and distribution of sweets.

The First Column

Great excitement prevailed during the first above-ground concreting operation - the casting of one of the nine circular basement columns of the inner podium. The unusual feature of this column was that its surface was to appear jointless and fair-faced. So the circular timber mould was lined with fiberglass sheets. This necessitated extra care during concrete placement and vibration to prevent damage to the lining. Concreting over, we went home that day with a sense of fulfillment and achievement.

The next morning Mr. Sahba and team gathered and awaited, with bated breath, the de-shuttering of our first column. Carefully the shutters were loosened and gently removed. The first to rush forward for a close inspection was Mr.Sahba. As he examined the column, from top to bottom and all around, his smile disappeared. As his sensitive hands passed over the column surface he became more serious. His head shook from side to side. As I stepped forward he whispered in Persian, this could not be approved. The surface was pocked with "bug-holes" - air pockets. Apparently concrete vibration had not been proper.

Mr. Sahba and I went back to the office to discuss the contractual implications of ordering demolition of the column, and how best to make the decision palatable to the Contractor. Mr. Tilak was invited to the office. Mr. Sahba conveyed his professional opinion and regretted he could not approve the column. As representative of the National Spiritual Assembly I endorsed Mr. Sahba's view, and requested the column be replaced. The usually co-operative and docile Mr. Tilak, disturbed and almost defiant, asked *"Are you suggesting that I demolish the column? Nobody knows concrete better than ECC, and no ECC concrete has been demolished in twenty-eight years."* Mr. Sahba read out for him the relevant specification, agreed that though structurally sound, the column surface had more bug-holes than permitted. That was a physical reality Mr. Tilak could not deny. Since the column finish was not as per specifications he was contractually bound to replace it. His defiance and anger gave way to conciliation. *"My concrete is my creation, you want me to destroy it! That column is like my child, how can I strangle it?"* This was an unexpected stance, but Mr. Sahba and I had decided from the outset we would stand by the contract and not dilute the specifications. We would insist on what was specified and designed, and indeed what we were paying for. We would not accept poor workmanship, even at a discounted price, nor would we agree to cosmetic repairs. Mr. Sahba expressed appreciation for Mr. Tilak's feelings and queried whether he preferred people to be attracted by the beauty of his "child" or be repelled by its ugly pock-marks? Did he desire posterity to admire and be impressed by ECC workmanship or otherwise? Mr. Tilak reluctantly agreed to demolish the column and strode thoughtfully away.

That was a harsh and difficult decision we took, considering that we were already behind schedule. It also meant wastage of materials in desperately short supply. But it was important that the message registered that we would undeviatingly hold the Contractor to the specifications and not compromise on quality of workmanship or material. That initial lesson was well learned, for on the morrow, after de-shuttering the second column, Mr. Tilak himself rejected it. That was the only way to raise the standard of the contractor to that required by the Project. Now the urgency of catching up with the schedule was felt all round, and the criticality of conforming with the specifications was underscored.

Consistent implementation of the contract conditions, and in all circumstances, was sensitive and difficult, especially if there was room for interpretation. Mr. Sahba and I often discussed and even seriously debated pros and cons of sensitive issues, their legal, contractual and financial implications, before a decision was handed down to the Contractor. On no issues whatever was there ever a vestige of misunderstanding between Mr. Sahba and me. Differences of views were candidly voiced, consultations ensued, but being both completely dedicated to the Project, we accepted each other's views and concerns as genuine and unmotivated. We shared the same dream, worked towards the same goal. Friends commented that we functioned as one soul in two bodies. Complimentary – yes! Unusual – no! That was the normal Bahá'í way to function – justly, selflessly, with fervour, zeal and passion!

Mock-ups

While foundation and column concreting progressed, simultaneously with basement area clearing and dressing, another critical activity was innocuously under way in a corner of the huge carpentry shed, away from the general gaze. The contract called for the fabrication of full scale mock-ups of certain critical elements of the building. These were necessary to ensure full understanding of the drawings, for formwork designing and erection, for devising reinforcement fixing, and finally for concreting and vibration methods. The first mock-up was the critical junction of the arch, entrance and outer leaf. A senior ECC engineer and the carpentry foreman were delegated this responsibility. The former was a brilliant young and the most promising of ECC engineers. The latter an experienced and excellent formwork designer, reputed for his work on the dome-capped Dubai International Airport building. Both had commendable performance records.

Each morning on my round of the site I saw these two engrossed in discussions and poring over drawings. Day after day, into the third, fourth week I saw them completely immersed in their study, but I saw no sign of any mock-up. Into the sixth week, and my patience ran out. I could not walk past them with the usual exchange of greetings. I stopped to enquire what progress was made. Their answer stunned me. "*Sir, we cannot understand the drawings*"! The engineer's reply completely floored me. Awed and annoyed I asked why they had not sought clarifications from Mr. Sahba, or from Dr. Flint. *"Sir, we did not know what questions to ask. We are now compiling our questions!"* This was no reflection on their capability, but a statement on the complexity of the design. That it took six weeks for a competent engineer and skilled formwork designer to record all they did not understand from the drawings, spoke volumes for the complexity of the design. Though disturbed, I was impressed by the engineer's candour. He made no excuses, blurted out the simple truth! However, subsequently armed with needed clarifications, the two eventually did untangle the problems and produced the required mock-up to an amazing degree of accuracy without the help of computers. Mr. Sahba was thrilled, but it was not before January 1981 that shop-drawings were completed and work started on the erection of the mock-up. That took a full month. It was

unfortunate that the engineer was wooed away for a construction project in the Middle-East, and the formwork specialist was constrained to return to Punjab to tend to his family estate, due to the serious illness of his son.

Other mock-ups required were of the entrance, outer and inner leaves. As each leaf having two identical halves, it was sufficient to fabricate just the one half of each. These proved simpler and were fabricated with relative ease. The geometry and curvature of each was checked by our team of architects and engineers, and templates were made for use in checking curvatures of the shutters during construction of the leaves. The carpentry shed where these mock-ups were assembled resembled a shipyard making hulls for ships. The huge inner leaf mock-up was nick-named *Noah's Ark*.

Crane

The changing of the South Delhi skyline with the growth of columns was highlighted by the gradual rise of the Potain tower crane, the tallest in India at that time. It was visible from miles around, and appeared in every construction photograph over six years. Section by huge section, elements of this massive crane were put in place like some huge lego model. Siting of the tower crane was the subject of debate in the Contractor's camp. One view was that the crane be made stationary in one of the pool areas. The other wanted it mounted on rails and made mobile over a semi-circle around the building. The latter made a greater area of the building accessible by the crane but obstructed work in the pools areas over which it would traverse. The former view won, and the crane was stationed in one of the pool areas. However, the logic of the latter view dawned upon all within a few weeks. In June 1981, through an engineering feat to marvel at, the crane, without dismantling, was raised and re-located on rails in the upper pools level. But for the mobility of the tower crane, the building could not have been completed in the time frame that it was.

Change of Guard

The unfortunate event in October 1981 was the resignation of Mr. Tilak. His wife had been ailing in Madras since several months, and he had regretfully to leave the project. He was succeeded by his immediate assistant Mr. Balasubramaniam. The change of guard proved inauspicious, as the course of events revealed.

THE LOTUS BLOOMS

As the pace and scope of work increased, so was the work force augmented with the arrival of additional worker families. Separate teams worked feverishly on the main and ancillary buildings. By end-November 1980 the last of the arch-column footings was concreted. December end saw the rise of all nine central basement columns. The remaining columns were in different stages of reinforcement tying, shuttering, concreting, and curing. Clearing and levelling of the basement area commenced, as also excavation of pools. Simultaneously the ancillary building area was cleared and levelled. Being virtually underground, it's floor areas, walls, and ceiling, above which would come terrace gardens, required water-proofing. Additionally the entire floor area was given anti-termite chemical treatment.

Pest-control treatment for floor areas gave way to water-proofing, followed by reinforcement fixing, and finally, concreting. Completion of the ancillary building flooring made it possible to have the first Bahá'í meeting on the Temple grounds on 18th Nov. 1980.

Completion and study of the full-scale mock-up of the complicated junction of the Arch, Inner and Outer Leaf in February 1981 provided answers to the puzzling questions of reinforcement-fixing, shuttering and de-shuttering procedures, concrete placing and vibration. By the end of March 1981 all main C3 columns were raised to plinth level; concreting of pools was in an advanced stage; basement floor areas were concreted; erection of staging for inner podium slab was in progress.

The first quarter of 1981 saw the raising of the remaining outer basement columns. Five sets of nine columns radiating outwards from the centre, arose sequentially. The innermost two sets supported the inner podium. The next was the set of nine massive superstructure load-bearing columns. The fourth was the M-shaped columns from which spring the entrance and outer leaves. The fifth and sixth were the V-shaped and rectangular columns supporting the outer podium and bridges. In the periphery was a set of abutments that housed filtration plants and equipment. With experience and confidence gained from extensive experimentation, the specified form finish in the basement area was achieved with remarkable success. The maintenance-free finish bears the texture of rough-sawn timber with natural veins and knots. Soon fame of the Temple exposed concrete spread through the construction fraternity.

The site was not without "fun-breaks"! One morning our Man-Friday Bhattiji rushed into my office to announce the arrival of two Delhi Development Authority (DDA) officers. The visit of DDA officials to a construction site usually rings alarm bells. But we had nothing to worry about. I welcomed them and enquired if they were on an official inspection visit. They explained they were Project and Construction Manager of the nearby fruit and vegetable market under construction. They had heard of our fair-faced concrete and wanted to see it, and possibly to reproduce the same at their project. So their's wasn't an official visit! With a stern face I said, *"I'll be happy to show you our concrete finishes, but it won't be for free!"* They looked at me non-plussed. I explained, *"Upon seeing our finishes, you will want to know how we achieved them. That is consultancy! We have spent a great deal of time and money in developing the technique. We would not part with this information to anybody else, but since you are from the DDA, we will charge you a nominal fee."* They continued to stare at me in disbelief. But their discomfort melted away when tea and biscuits arrived. They happily paid the "tea and biscuits punishment" cost as the condition for viewing the works. And so off to site we strode! They inspected our concrete column finishes with incredulous eyes, running their hands slowly and appreciatively over the timber-textured surfaces, knocking on the concrete as if to be sure it was not timber! They kept repeating "*It looks just like wood, but it is concrete*." They left, happy and grateful engineers, but admitted they could not produce such finishes that required a high level of commitment, care, and cost.

The visit of DDA officers was followed by another important visit. Noting the on-going construction activity in a hitherto undeveloped area had attracted the attention of the Municipal Commissioner. A convoy of three cars entered the site. The Municipal Commissioner and his retinue of officers, were welcomed and conducted around the site, briefed about the Bahá'í Faith and the Temple building. The Commissioner was particularly interested. Over tea in the office, his many questions were answered. He was clearly impressed by the building design, by the idea of non-communal worship to promote communal harmony, and more so on learning that the Temple would, in future, have dependencies to serve the needs of the underprivileged of society, like institutions to spread education, and hospitals and homes to care for the ill and aged, etc. He wished the project speedy success and penned his appreciation in the visitors book: *"Visit to this Temple of faith and service to humanity, even in it's construction stage, is a rare privilege and a pilgrimage. To what heights the visitor would be transported once it is complete cannot perhaps be described in words."*

Podium

The second quarter of 1981 saw the construction of the podium, the inner part of which formed the prayer hall floor, and outer part, the walkway around the superstructure. Concreting commenced on 9th. May 1981 and progressed without hindrance through the following four months until completion on 16th September.

An interesting competition ensued between man and machine during podium slab casting. Two concrete batching plants were operational, one from which the crane lifted 250 Kgm loads of concrete, and the second from which women labourers lifted 20 Kgm head-loads. Podium concreting was perhaps the most visibly active operation, with the crane swinging back and forth, up and down, lifting and delivering concrete. Vying with the crane crew was the human conveyor-belt of women, in their colourful sarees, half-walking half-running, gracefully and sure-footed on narrow planks placed over the slab reinforcement, and in step with their joyous sing-song. Like programmed robots, this human chain moved back and forth, not to be outdone by modern technology. Incredibly the labour force matched the speed of the machine.

A distinguishing feature of the podium structure was that its beams did not rest directly on supporting columns below, as in normal construction. Special neoprene bearing pads were inserted between the beams and columns, as in bridge construction, to allow free lateral movements of the podium, due to expansion and contraction during extreme weather conditions. The bearing pads would also absorb seismic movements and prevent damage due to earthquakes. Completion of podium concreting on 16th Sept. 1981 was a milestone of achievement and the occasion was celebrated with a grand dinner party for all site staff at an hotel the same night. The next morning at site, the large circular acerage of jointless concrete, presented a surreal view. Amid the usual strewn-around equipment and paraphernalia of the construction site, lay this insular structure, as if descended from the skies, the throne of our divine lotus. In prayerful reverie one imagined the growth upon it of the nine elegant

arches, and distinctive lotus leaves rising from that sacred spot, like hands raised in prayer.

Ancillary Building

Work on the Ancillary Building progressed satisfactorily. Concreting of the entire floor was completed, work commenced on raising its concrete walls, and also on preparations the roof slab.

Completion of the ancillary building, with final concreting and water-proofing of the roof slab was celebrated by end October 1981.

Outstanding events in the third quarter of 1981 also were the commencement of construction of the main entrance steps, staging of bridges between the podium and abutments, and retaining walls of pools. This was the last normal grey concreting operation. From here on we would venture into raising the complicated, curvatured superstructure in white concrete, with the help of the ever-present Hidden Hand.

Arches

The arches, mainstay of the superstructure, are a fascinating element of the building. Each arch represents a section, cut in two different planes on its inner and outer face, of a cone with its vertex at the centre of the prayer hall. Hence the accuracy of marking that imaginary centre and setting out the position of the first arch was critical. Upon its accuracy depended the exact position of the remaining arches, and the final positions of all petals. In order to achieve the required accuracy, eighteen reference points were established outside the building for setting out the arches, entrance, outer and inner leaves. Eighteen radial lines were established from the exact centre of the podium, establishing reference points twenty degree apart, each alternate point representing the crest of an arch. This achieved, the crest of the zero degree arch was verified and confirmed to be exactly at seventeen degrees west of north-west, the direction of *qiblih,* Bahji in Acre, Akka of yore, in Israel. Endless checks and re-checks were carried out by our engineers before clearance was given to proceed. Since instruments generally used were not sensitive enough to ensure the required level of accuracy, the most sensitive Zeiss theodolite was imported for use of the Contractor.

Mr. Sahba had originally planned to leave the arches in grey exposed concrete. So virgin plywood was used for fabricating shutters, and extra care was taken to ensure the accurate geometry of the multi-faceted arch. Tying in place of the eighteen tons of steel reinforcement bars within the congested space was time-consuming and difficult. The experience of having to demolish the first basement column, made the Contractor especially wary during arch concreting. Careful attention was paid to placing and proper vibration of the 109 cubic metres of concrete that filled each arch.

Casting the first arch on 26th March 1982 was a morale booster. Now out of the pits and above the podium, construction speed accelerated to catch up with the schedule. There was all-round celebration when the first arch

was deshuttered to reveal a majestic structure in exposed concrete of the finest quality. However, Mr. Sahba's elation gave way to rethinking of leaving the arches in grey exposed concrete, because visitors, unfamiliar with fair-faced concrete technology, might think the unplastered, unpainted arch surfaces were incomplete. Hence, he decided to clad the arches also with marble.

Experience and confidence gained in raising the first arch accelerated work on this important front. Separate teams worked simultaneously on six arches, with fabricators erecting steel support staging, carpenters fixing plywood shutters, bar-benders tying in place galvanized reinforcement bars, all under the vigilant supervision of our engineers.

Work on the ancillary building progressed steadily. The concrete walls were cast and water-proofed. Preparations for casting the roof slab were completed.

The second of the nine arches was completed that hot, memorable 23rd of April 1982. With the added experience and confidence gained, construction of the remaining arches proceeded apace. By July-end 1982 nine majestic arches stood above the podium. Upon completion of arches an encouraging message was received from the Universal House of Justice: *"News completion first phase superstructure Temple New Delhi caused much joy. Congratulate appreciate efforts devoted souls directly involved this magnificent Project. Assure fervent prayers success further steps."*

The Lotus Rises

The magnificence of the Temple building is accentuated by the symmetry and beauty of the delicate lotus petals. Construction of these double curvatured, torroidal, egg-shell-thick jointless concrete shells was unprecedented, and called for very exacting vigilance and quality control. In the words of Mr. S. Naharoy, ECC General Manager in charge of the Project: "*Unlike conventional structures for which the elements are defined by dimensions and levels, here the shape, size, thickness, and other details were indicated in the drawing only by levels, radii, and equations. With the help of a computer, unprecedented in India at the time, the parameters were converted into a set of dimensions in terms of length, breadth, height and thickness, easily understood by a site engineer or carpentry foreman."*

After accurately setting out the position of each leaf, steel frames approximating its geometry were erected, on which were bolted timber rafters. On the rafters were fixed timber frames. Half-inch thick plywood on the frames completed the inner or lower shutter. This assembly was checked for accuracy of the dimesions and curvature using templates made from the mock-ups. Then galvanized reinforcement bars were tied in place with galvanized binding wire. Next, timber panels faced with plywood were fixed in position to make up the outer or upper shutter. The final assembly checked out by our engineers, the outer frames were numbered and their positions marked, again dismantled, and stacked on platforms at requisite levels. The lowest rows of panels were kept in place in readiness to receive concrete. Unfortunately, labour unrest prevented commencement of

superstructure concreting.

LABOUR RELATIONS

A fruitful and cordial atmosphere prevailed at site for three years, and work progressed satisfactorily, though slightly behind schedule. Teams of contract workers, under the close watch of our supervisory team pursued their work diligently. As advised by Mr. Sahba, our supervisory team were careful not to interfere in the Contractor's labour relations, but earned the respect of the entire labour force by ensuring their reasonable comfort and safety, and above all of just rewards for honest labour. Besides the Contractors teams of workers, sub-contractors were engaged for minor works outside the ambit of the main contract, such as paving of walkways, earth works, shoe-room construction, landscaping, etc.

Among petty contracts awarded to labour contractors for small works was the bulk of earth works of relocating excavated boulders and debris on the estate to conform to levels as per the landscaping design, through a group of some twenty Rajasthani labour - men and women. They were inducted by a labour contractor who, we discovered paid them a pittance. This work-force was led by two illiterate young men. Seeing how hard they worked through the hot summer days, it appeared unfair that the labour contractor was hugely profiteering from their labour. It was therefore in the fitness of things to directly offer them such petty contracts to give them better returns for their labour. And that is what we did, whereby they earned 50% more than the wages offered them by their contractor. The ire of a profiteering sub-contractor was more than offset by the gratitude of the group of Rajasthani labourers.

Relations between the Contractor and labour remained cordial until early 1983, when differences arose between them. The body of workers, instigated by a few, demanded an arbitrary wage increase. The contractor, already in financial straits, could not oblige. So workers joined a labour union, which launched an agitation, and resorted to go-slow tactics. As the Contractor did not yield to their demands, the labour resorted to their ultimate strategy. They struck work. The Contractor was faced with a full-scale confrontation.

Some six hundred workers sat demonstrating at the entrance gate, engaged in shouting slogans and heckling the Contractor's staff. When several days of demonstrations and slogan-shouting proved of no avail, the trade union leaders adopted a more hostile attitude. Sensing, from the threatening slogans, a possible resort to violence, Mr. Sahba and our staff left the site. We managed to send out, unnoticed in our cars, some of the Contractor's staff and engineers to safety, but not all could leave. I chose to hold the fort, and alerted the security staff to arrange a cordon of guards around the building structure. It was crucial to ensure the enraged workers did not cause any damage to the building, which at that time was staged in steel and shuttered in timber and plywood. A can of petrol and a matchstick could reduce it to a cinder and send three years of intensive work up in smoke. The slogan-shouting continued and became more threatening and abusive, led by outbursts of incendiary instigation by union leaders. As the

sun set, the shouting rose to a crescendo. Having raised the workers' anger to fever-pitch, the union leader ordered the men to arm themselves with rods from our steel yard adjoining the office. This was the danger signal. Their intention was to let loose armed workers on the Contractor's hapless engineers and staff. Then I do not know who took command over me. I stepped forward in the doorway and yelled above their clamour that anybody entering the office would have to go over my dead body. Workers, with raised steel rods, kept shouting and pressing forward, but stopped short of forcing their way past me. It was not me, but I could hear my voice ordering the workers to drop the rods. And surprisingly they did! They even obeyed the order to sit down and hear me out. Convinced that an attack on the offices and personnel of the contractor would gain them nothing, but rather harm their cause, they permitted the staff to leave. Although Mr. Sahba and I had agreed to steer clear of the contractor's labour problems, lest we be blamed in the worsening contractor-labour relations, we agreed to do so, when the Contractor, recognizing the very close rapport with their labour, sought our intervention to stem the tide of dissent.

The next morning we assembled the workers in the park opposite the site office, and asked them to choose six trusted representatives to take part in joint discussions with the Contractor to resolve all issues. The elected six, their trade union leaders and the Contractor's project manager, gathered for the crucial meeting in my office. A few words of advice sufficed to drive home the point that it was in everybody's interest to arrive at an understanding. That agreed all round, I locked the office door from inside, and announced nobody would leave until an agreement was hammered out. It took seven hours of coaxing, placating, explaining, threatening, and reminding all of the serious consequences of a breakdown in negotiations. Each labour demand was analysed, debated, negotiated, and understanding arrived at. The understandings and agreements needed to be drawn up on paper and signed. The time being long past office hours, some suggested the papers be drawn up and signed on the morrow, but we could not run the risk of allowing for after-thoughts overnight. While they were served tea and refreshments in the office, I typed out the agreement and had it signed by all. There was genuine relief and hand-shakes all round that Saturday night of 28th March 1983. It was agreed and announced that work would resume on the following Monday – 30th March. And it did, with the distribution of sweets. Unfortunately the truce was short-lived. Without courtesy of information or consultation with us, the Contractor announced the retrenchment of a hundred workers on 1st April. That enraged the workers, and brought about total stoppage of work and lock-out of the site.

With no solution in sight of the labour problem and resumption of work, Mr. Sahba decided to seek legal advice from our solicitors in Bombay, in order to decide our course of action to push the project to completion. Mr. Sahba and I flew to Bombay with a suitcase full of files and papers for perusal by solicitors. At the solicitor's office we were told they had no time to wade through the mass of documents and correspondence. They wanted a legal brief for their study, and they wanted it the following day.

I rushed to the nearby office of the Spiritual Assembly of Bahá'ís of Bombay

and worked on the brief alone through the rest of the day, and non-stop through the night. From the voluminous files of correspondence, site reports, contract documents, etc. I extracted important and relevant facts, and put together the legal brief, and underscored the genesis of the labour trouble. And to make it easy for the solicitor to refer to cited documents, I tagged and marked them for easy access. By next mid-morning the brief was nearly ready, when I experienced severe chest pain. I had experienced such pain one night earlier at site during the labour trouble, and it had subsided then. So I thought the pain would subside. It grew worse, and I started perspiring profusely. Alone and helpless, I phoned my sister's office. She rushed to the Bahá'í Centre, put me in a cab and rushed me to hospital. I was admitted into the Intensive Care Unit under a reputed cardiologist. Diagnosis – acute myocardiac infarct - a heart attack in common parlance. The cardiologist opined the attack was due to stress, tension, and anxiety over Temple labour problems. He barred visitors, especially anyone connected with Temple construction. Even Mr. Sahba was not allowed to visit me.

Isolated and rigged to monitors in an intensive cardiac care ward, I only thought of and worried about the Temple. How could the problem be resolved? Mr. Sahba and I had discussed, on several occasions, the developing situation in which our Contractor found themselves. They were losing money. We agreed that in all fairness they deserved an increase in rates. We also decided that if the Contractor came forward with a request, we would respond favourably, because no other contractor could be found to complete the complex construction. So we awaited a move from the Contractor. However, instead of that, they precipitated a labour crisis, and declared a lock-out of the site. Possibly they thought that, as we had hitherto held them strictly to the contract terms, we would continue to do so, and not agree to any concessions. Or perhaps they thought if they brought the work to a stop, we would capitulate and be forced to give in to their demands. The unfortunate situation could have been avoided, had the Contractor discussed their financial problem candidly with us.

The cardiologist wanted me to be completely cut off from Temple related problems, but I could think of nothing else. I asked the nurse for paper and pen. She didn't ask why. Perhaps she thought I wanted to write my Will! I wrote a note to Mr. Sahba, drawing attention to vital points in the brief I had typed. More importantly I suggested we should engage the Contractor in negotiations, rather than resort to legal proceedings, which would take months, perhaps years. I recommended the preferred settlement should not offer the Contractor a blanket percentage increase in rates, but agree to pay amounts, commensurate with the value of each item of work completed, as an inducement, a bonus. This would encourage the Contractor to complete a stipulated quantum of work, and claim a reward. This strategy was finally adopted and agreed after negotiations by Mr. Sahba and Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly with the Contractor's Chairman in Madras. The project was placed uner the direct control of the Head Office, in charge of their General Manager Mr. S. S. Naharoy, with a totally new construction team of engineers and labour.

RESUMPTION OF WORK

Responsibility of leading the new team fell upon the shoulders of Mr. Joganando Ganguly, whose interest in the Project had drawn him to visit the site in June 1981 and August 1982. ECC management entrusted the Project to Mr. Ganguly because of his experience in the erection of cement factories, thermal power plants, modernization of steel plants, etc. He had to his credit the completion of three new projects, and also of having successfully completed two projects mired in technical difficulties and labour problems. In accepting the challenging assignment of completing a structure of unprecedented complexity Mr. Ganguly stated: "*I had no hesitation in accepting the assignment, but the possibility of being able to pull it off, in view of the background of the Project, was cause for worry. However great the apprehensions, I was prepared to put in my best, and with that mind set I set about the work. I surmised that if the budget was worked out and agreed with the client, other problems of the complexity of the work, exacting standards, client's satisfaction, labour problems, etc. could be sorted out.*" He added: "*The first important step was to plan the remaining work in sufficient detail, which took us three months between September and December 1983. The complexity of the work and related problems unfolded during this stage, and the working drawings we prepared became our path-finder through the Project."*

Upon successful completion of construction a jubilant Mr. Ganguly confided: "*When we resumed operations no one could confidently claim we would be able to complete the job. Our determination to do our very best, with the encouraging support of senior Larsen & Toubro Management, and the high level of understanding and co-operation of the client and consultants. Complete rapport was possible because we all worked as a single team with the same objective – to complete the Temple construction on time and to do it well."* Commenting on construction features that caused anxiety Mr. Ganguly said: "*There wasn't any item of work that did not cause anxiety. Despite meticulous planning and micro-detailing, the commencement of every new activity presented its problems and anxiety. Examples were first formworks of the Inner and Entrance Leaves, the special type of marble cladding of the first Arch."* On the subject of marble cladding work, which was not originally included in their contract, Mr. Ganguly stated: *"Mr. Sahba proposed to include it for two reasons. Firstly because he felt the staff, labour and infrastructure existed at site for marble cladding, and secondly, that if Larsen & Toubro did not do so, credit for completion of the building would be shared with another contractor. The suggestion convinced us, and we were happy to have successfully executed the first dry-cladding operation in India at the Bahá'í Temple."* Mr. Ganguly affirmed that all those involved in the successful execution of this difficult project had gained enough experience and confidence to execute the most difficult work to the most exacting standards. He echoed the words of Mr. Holck-Larsen, Chairman and Managing Director of Larsen & Toubro, that building the Bahá'í Temple was by far the best work executed by them. And their immediate reward was the contract to build two luxury hotels in the trourist resorts of Bukhara and Samarkhand. The Russian team in charge of the project awarded them the contract after viewing their Temple Project work, despite keen competition from international construction companies.

Work resumed in January 1984, after a lapse of nine months, with a totally new construction team headed. No problems were experienced with the new site management team or labour, because a greater level of trust was established all round. The site was speedily re-mobilised and all arrangements made to proceed with the stalled construction of the superstructure. A major factor that influenced concreting operations was the weather. Since concreting would be spread over more than twelve months, provision was made for this operation during different seasons. Autumn and winter were the more convenient concreting seasons on account of lower temperatures. During the monsoon season the entire leaf to be concreted was covered with water-proof canvas to prevent rain from interrupting operations. Summer concreting was the most problematic. Whereas ambient temperatures averaged above forty degrees, white concrete temperatures had to be kept below twenty-eight degrees. Fully twenty-four hours before concreting operations, desert coolers and air-conditioners were used to lower the temperature of aggregate and sand stored in closed bins. A roof shade protected the steel water tank from the sun and the tank itself was insulated against heat. And finally tonnes of crushed ice were added to the concrete mix to lower the temperature to the required level. Often concreting was scheduled during nights so as to avail of lower temperatures. In any case, our engineer was deployed at the batching plant to note the temperature of each batch of concrete. If the temperature exceeded twenty-six degrees, that batch of concrete was rejected. Another thermometer-wielding engineer checked temperatures at the delivery location to ensure concrete temperature did not exceed twenty-eight degrees. Such were the stringent measures that one of the Contractor’s supervisors remarked that temperature of patients were not so closely monitored in hospitals as was our concrete temperature!

White concreting on this scale was unprecedented in India and all were justifiably nervous at the commencement of this new operation. Each step of concrete-mixing, placing and vibration was explained by our engineers for the complete understanding of all concerned personnel. Roles and responsibilities were made clear. There could be no mistakes, no hold-ups, no interruptions once concreting commenced. A test-run of all the equipment was made, with stand-by equipment at the ready in the event of breakdowns. After overall review of all steps was the check-list jointly signed and the final clearance given by Mr. Sahba. And the first petal concreting operation got under way. Labourers delivered loads of white aggregate, sand and cement into the weigh-batcher, where our supervisor monitored the weights of aggregate of different sizes, sand, and cement. The weighed quantities were transferred into the mixer and a measured quantity of water was added. Churned into a homogeneous mass, and discharged into the crane bucket, its temperature checked, the concrete was whisked away by the crane. At the point of placing, its temperature was checked again, and the concrete filled into the shutters, on one face of the petal. While needle and form vibration was carried out on one face of each petal, the concreting process was repeated on the adjoining face. Vibration over, carpenters fixed in place the next set of shutters on the first face. And the whole process was repeated. Concreting, vibration, frame fixing, alternated on each petal face, until the top was reached. The entire process

was a non-stop, continuous forty-eight hour operation, involving six eight-hour shifts of work by labourers, supervisors, and engineers. Witnessing and marveling at the growth of each petal, through every hour, was a rare privilege. In sequence the three sets of leaves were completed in white concrete on 22nd Sept. 1985.

The entrance leaves are 18.2m. wide and rise 7.8m above the podium. Outer leaves are 15.4m. wide and their height is 22.5m. The uniformly 20cm. thick Inner leaves rise to a height of 34.3m above the inner podium and their width, at the lowest level is 14m.

The Lotus Bud

The interior dome, purporting to be the lotus bud is a lattice of nine intersecting concrete hemispheres only 7cm. thick, the construction of which presented serious space problems. The casting of such delicate criss-crossing concrete shells would normally require perhaps ten times the space actually available, within which the support staging and the timber moulds could be accurately erected, and adequate space made available for concrete placing and vibration. Other than normal concreting procedures were explored. Alternatives tested on mock-ups were sprayed concrete and ferrocrete, the latter a procedure used for casting yacht hulls. Sprayed concrete or guniting was not practical. And ferrocreting, demonstrated by special invitee Mr. Max Hancock, a Bahá'í expert from New Zealand, was unprecedented in India. Eventually normal concrete placing method was employed, but space constraints were a serious hindrance. With greater reliance upon prayer and less on experience, concreting of one segment was carried out on 8th June 1985. No concreting operation could be slower, or imaginably more difficult, given the constraints and required quality finish. Every movement of robot-like workers was limited, but God was with us. We did not proceed with remaining segments until the result of the first attempt was seen the following day. With bated breath we stood, necks strained, eyes glued to the dome, as each shutter was gently pried loose. Through the maze of the space frame we got the first glimpse of the interior dome section. All heaved a great sigh of relief. Mr. Sahba's smile signaled his approval to proceed with the remaining sections of the interior dome.

The natural growth of the lotus begins with the bud, which blossoms and blooms until all petals open in exquisite beauty. The growth of our lotus was in reverse order but was exquisitely beautiful all the same.

IN FULL BLOOM

Marble Cladding

Construction of the interior dome was the last major concreting operation. The building was now structurally complete, and stood out in white above the south Delhi horizon. Attention now was focused on marble cladding of the arches and petals, flooring and paving works. Two aspects of marble cladding needed to be addressed. First was the cladding design, and second, the manner of fixing marble panels on the double-curvatured faces of the arches and leaves. The cladding design was done by Engrs. Danda

and Repelle of Marmi Vincentini. Engr. Danda had come in April 1982, accompanied by Mr. Sohrab Youssefian, to study the first completed arch. After four days of studying and measuring the arch, and at times just standing and viewing the arch from a distance, this seasoned cladding designer admitted that he had lost his sleep trying to design suitable cladding. He had never attempted cladding a structure with so many curved faces and planes, with nary a straight line. Almost three years later Engr. Danda returned to Delhi with his colleague Engr. Repelle, to firm up the design conceptualized in Italy. The final design is a tribute to their ingenuity, for it has immeasurably enhanced the beauty of the Temple building.

Traditionally, marble is embedded upon concrete or masonry walls with cement mortar. This method works satisfactorily provided the cladded area is small, the weather is equable, and the structure is not susceptible to excessive expansion and contraction. If the expansion and contraction, as in reinforced concrete structures, exposed to extreme temperatures, is excessive then marble is liable to crack and break. In the Temple building the cladding area was vast, and the leaves, having excessive steel reinforcement, were susceptible to greater expansion and contraction due to the extreme climate conditions. Hence it was inadvisable to use the traditional method of marble cladding. The solution lay in the unprecedented method of ‘dry cladding’ i.e. without mortar. A French consultant was invited to Delhi to explain this system. He demonstrated how marble panels could be anchored to, and held above the concrete shells with stainess steel anchors, leaving an air-gap between the marble panels and concrete shell. This arrangement allowed independent expansion and contraction movements of marble and concrete at their respective rates, without causing stress to either material. The contractor’s foreman practiced on sample concrete panels and in turn trained workers to be deployed for this activity. Amazingly it was not stone masons but carpenters who carried out this work with relative ease. The same carpenters who had fabricated and installed formwork (shuttering) for the leaves, were so familiar with the geometry that it was easy for them to follow the cladding pattern. Accordingly holes were drilled in the concrete shells, into which were grouted stainless steel anchors, which in turn held in place the marble panels. The grouted holes were sealed to ensure complete water-tightness. Thus marble panels, held three centimeters above the concrete shells, with the possibility to move independently of each other and of the concrete shells were fitted together like pieces of a giant jig-saw puzzle. As the process of dry cladding was unprecedented in India, so was the process of sealing the marble joints with silicone sealant.

Marble cladding was scheduled to commence with the first outer leaf on 20th May 1984. All appeared to be in a state of readiness. A last minute check by our engineers indicated a two millimeter discrepancy in the starting level, which if not corrected could disturb the pattern altogether. All the vertical and horizontal joints had to be exactly right or the continuity of the joint lines would be disturbed. The two millimeter difference could progressively increase, and result at the top of the leaves, in perhaps a two centimeter error. So it had to be corrected. And it took the Contractor until

the afternoon of 22nd May to make the correction. Late the same afternoon the first marble panel was permanently fixed in place. The slow and careful fixing of the first few panels gave the workers the necessary confidence to proceed with greater speed, but with the same care. The result is there for all the world to see. All vertical lines flow down the leaves in gentle arcs, but without a hair-breadth deviation. And all horizontal lines similarly go around the superstructure.

The gnawing fear that loomed over us during the cladding operation was that each marble panel fitted only in its own designated location and nowhere else. That meant if a single panel was damaged it could not be substituted by another.This risk demanded extraordinary precautions to prevent any mishandling. Only trained and reliable workers were allowed to handle the marble, and two senior supervisors were specially delegated to oversee this work. The Contractor designed and built their own steel cart with pneumatic tyres to transport marble panels, without jerks and bumps, from the storage area to the make-shift workshop within reach of the tower crane, where holes were drilled in them. The readied panels were lifted by crane and gently lowered to the location where gloved hands fastened them to the anchors. Happily the entire marble cladding exercise was carried out smoothly and safely because of the micro-detailing of handling arrangements and vigilant supervision of our team. In this monumental piece of work, more than in any other construction activity at site, was evidence of the Divine Hand protecting the Project. How else can it be explained that on a construction site in India, some ten thousand slabs of marble were trundled around on uneven ground, four holes drilled in each panel, lifted to a height of up to forty metres, and accurately anchored in place without damage to or loss of a single slab?

Happy with the rich marble-clad appearance of the external surface of the petals, Mr. Sahba wanted the under-surfaces to be bush-hammered, so as to remove the fine cement layer and expose the white stone aggregate. This one-time exercise would leave the surface permanently maintenance-free, requiring no plaster or paint. This too was an unprecedented exercise in India. Trials on experimental panels using Hilti machines proved unsuitable. Instead of removing only the cement film, the machine gouged out lumps of concrete, leaving uneven, pock-marked surfaces. The alternative appeared to be the age-old chisel and hammer, wielded by stone masons. Manual bush-hammering would certainly derail our time schedule and budgetary allocation for this work. An army of stone masons would be needed to bush-hammer the nine thousand square metre surface area, and the cost would be astronomical. Mr. Sahba suggested if the Contractor trained unskilled labour to carry out this work, an immense saving could be effected, and the labour also benefit with higher wages of semi-skilled workers.

A dozen selected workers were led to the quality control yard, where stood several experimental concrete panels and columns. The contractor’s charge-hand explained and demonstrated what was expected of them. Provided with chisel and hammer they were asked to replicate, and they did. Anybody could wield a chisel and hammer, but the secret here was to apply a uniform force so as to achieve a uniform surface. If each worker used a different

force, the result would be an irregularly undulating surface. Here was hope that with some practice, we could achieve fairly good bush-hammered surfaces at minimal cost. Groups of labour were trained, made to practice and demonstrate their ability, and then set on to the Temple building. Soon a hundred workers sat perched in orderly lines on scaffolding, one above the other, chip-chip-chip-chipping away, ever so delicately at the concrete surfaces, to give the beautiful internal finishes that are admired by the discerning.

Pools

The topography of the estate was such that the land sloped towards the East, the slope being steepest between the western boundary and the Temple entrance steps, including the area under the pools. Rather than excavate into hard rock at high cost to keep all nine pools at one level, Mr. Sahba had cleverly designed them to be at three levels. At the highest level were three on the western end. At the lowest level were two pools on each side of the entrance bridge. And at the medial level were one pool on either side. The lower four pools were constructed first. As the tower crane was mobile over the area of the remaining five pools, which were constructed after completion of the superstructure and dismantling of the crane. Pool floors were sloped towards an outlet drain which took the water to a storage tank outside for re-use in the gardens.

Construction of pools led to installation of fountains capable of jetting a metre-high wall of water. Filtration plants, similar to those used to keep swimming pool water clean, were installed in the abutments under the bridges. Use of filtration plants and water fountains proved expensive due to high electricity tariffs. So the fountains were operated only for an hour each morning and evening, and the water was kept clean by adding and spreading bleaching powder in the pools. Not only did bleaching powder keep the water free of algae, it also prevented the breeding of mosquitoes. Additionally, bleaching powder particles remaining suspended in the water, reflected sunlight, giving the water a light blue colour, giving the impression that pool floors were tiled in blue. This substantially reduced maintenance cost of the pools.

ANCILLARY WORKS

Flooring and Paving

As marble cladding progressed on the superstructure, work started on the 2000 sq.m. terrazzo flooring of the prayer hall and ancillary building, and 5000 sq.m. of paving of the podium, basement, bridges, entrance and pool steps. Mr. Sahba chose meter square, cast in-situ terrazzo panels, with selected combination of colours and sizes of stone chips, instead of the generally used 250mm square mosaic tiles. India’s largest tile manufacturer was entrusted with this work. Panels were cast using brass strips for expansion joints, properly cured, and finally polished.The ancillary building has terrazzo flooring throughout, and the prayer hall has a combination of marble and terrazzo flooring. Terrazzo-finished white balustrades, cast at site, were installed, which gave prominence to the stairways and ancillary building.

For all paving areas Mr. Sahba chose the oldest and most widely used stone in northern India, the red sandstone used in historical buildings like the famous Red Fort, Qutub Minar, and parliament buildings. Contract for this huge work was awarded to a reputed company, whose owner, Mr. Mohinderjit Singh, owned large sandstone quarries in Rajasthan. The cacophony of sounds at site was enriched with the hiss and whine of their large stone cutting machine. Truck loads of red sandstone arrived daily, were cut to required sizes, and expertly laid on floors or clad on walls. Given enough time to set, they were given a final polish. Hundred millimeter thick, chisel-dressed slabs were used for entrance and pools steps.

Of all contractors, and sub-contractors involved in the project whom we befriended, our most cordial and friendly rapport was with Mr. Mohinderjit Singh. Although he had tendered rates for the work in 1982, and work could not start until three years later due to delays and the labour strike, Mini, as we called him, agreed to carry out the work at the same rates, despite his cost escalation over the period. He supervised the work with missionary zeal, ensured the best workmanship, and completed the work on schedule.

The Prayer hall is not enclosed by walls, but glazed with special toughened glass imported from Japan. The large areas under outer leaves are glazed with the same glass. Thus sunlight streams into the prayer hall through the day, symbolic of perennial divine enlightenment and guidance.

Services Block

With the completion of the main Temple and Ancillary buildings, the last works item of the Contractor was construction of the services block, a landscaped building, located some hundred metres from the Temple building. It comprised two symmetrical halves, one half to house the electrical sub-station, in which was installed a diesel power generator that automatically took over electricity generation in the event of power failures or shut-downs. This was to ensure uninterrupted power supply to the main Temple building. The other half of the services block comprised toilet facilities for ladies and gents. The plush toilets, with non-stop water supply, fancy sanitary-ware and warm-air hand-dryers, were appreciated by visitors. With this final work item, the work of the main Contactor was over.

Having reduced their staff to the minimum, and moving our offices to the ancillary building, the site offices and godowns became redundant and were demolished. The temporary site entrance gate was closed and barbed wire fencing was replaced by a boundary wall parallel to the road. A main entrance gate was envisaged by Mr. Sahba, and designed by Mr. Ashraf. The steel gate, fabricated at site and installed.

Shoe Room

A cultural aspect that came to be latterly considered was the Indian tradition of removal of footwear before entering places of worship. The decision to adhere to this tradition meant providing adequate facilities for convenient and safe storage of visitors' footwear. An underground facility

along the main walkway, ahead of the main entrance steps, was approved by Mr. Sahba, and constructed departmentally. Excavation was carried out, its walls and roof slab were laid in reinforced concrete and water-proofed. Separate windows were made for check-in and delivery of footwear. Numbered pigeon-hole cabinets were fitted to store three thousand pairs of footwear.

The first test of the shoe-room functioning was the Temple dedication day. Three thousand Bahá'ís and special invitees were to attend each of the three inaugural sessions. At the shoe-room, footwear was received from participants in exchange for numbered tokens. Foreign dignitaries, unaccustomed to barefoot walking, were provided with cloth slip-ons. And upon conclusion of the ceremony all received their footwear without any confusion or mix-up.

A tale hangs by this Indian tradition. Some months after inauguration, volunteers reported a problem with a foreign visitor. I was called to trouble-shoot. A young Italian insisted on entering the prayer hall wearing his shoes. He claimed he was told that Bahá'í Temples had nine entrances, one for each religious community. So he wished to enter the prayer hall through the Christian entrance, wearing shoes. After explaining the significance of the number nine, I explained that removal of shoes was not a Bahá'í ritual and unrelated to religion. It was an Indian custom of showing respect. If anyone entered a temple or mosque with shoes on, it was a mark of disrespect, a sign of poor upbringing, like somebody misbehaving in St. Peter's Cathedral, or the Vatican. That seemed to register. I cited the example of Bahá'í Temples in other countries, where this tradition was not practiced, then invited him to enter the prayer hall as he wished. He promptly checked in his shoes at the shoe-room and entered the prayer hall respectfully. When he emerged I highlighted the great Italian contribution to the Temple. He was thrilled to hear praise of his countrymen and left the Temple a happy young man.

Walkways

The Temple building, located at the western end of the estate, required laying of approximately three kilometers of walkways around the building. Concrete walkways were first laid and paved with cobble stones of grey granitic rock and red sandstone. Originally it was planned that visitors' cars would enter through the Muhajir Gate, drive to the head of the walkway and turn into the parking area. Hence that stretch was paved with granitic cobbles for harder wear. The area from the head of the walkway to the Temple entrance steps, was paved with red sandstone cobbles. Subsequently, owing to the unexpected crowds, a separate entrance was arranged for cars and the Muhajir Gate was used solely for pedestrians. Only on special occasions, such as the visit of important dignitaries, is the Muhajir Gate opened for cars.

Interiors

As the building neared completion Mr. Sahba's attention shifted to furnishing of the interiors of the prayer hall, library, conference hall, offices and other facilities, the designing of which was entrusted Mr. Ashraf. For

the prayer hall Mr. Ashraf designed a simple and practical seating arrangement, comprising timber framed benches with marble seats, albeit with the lotus motif in the back rest. The tricky part of designing the benches was that they had to conform to a specific curvature when placed together. Thus each bench had to be part of an arc of a circle, the radius of which differed from row to row. And all rows of benches faced the zero degree arch, the *qiblih.* The benches were fabricated off site, and arranged in the prayer hall. Fabriction of prayer hall benches, and all painting work was carried out by Mr. Rajinderpal Gupta, who worked closely with Project team and accepted the Faith after completion of the Project.

The only adornment in the prayer hall is the Bahá'í symbol of the Greatest Name. The most suitable location was at the highest point of the interior dome. Thus the Greatest Name would be above the heads of all gathering in the prayer hall, as though bestowing blessings upon all worshippers. The beautiful symbol of the Greatest Name was designed by our ingenious designers, Mr. Sahba and Mr. Ashraf. A reputed manufacturer from Moradabad, the center of brass industry in India, was awarded the contract of manufacturing it's components. After several trips from Moradabad, with components in stages of completion, the completed symbol was assembled and installed by our able handy man Mr. Hasan Saberi.

Mr. Ashraf also designed furniture for a 200 seater conference hall, library, audio-visual room, kitchen, etc. The best seasoned Burma teak wood was procured for all furniture and wood work.

Archives Room

A room adjacent to the Maintenance Office in the basement of the main building was chosen by Mr. Sahba to house the precious archival material held since decades in the safe custody of the National Spiritual Assembly at Bahá'í House. They were initially stored in steel cabinets and later transferred to beautiful display cabinets designed by Mrs. Golnar Sahba. The space being inadequate for display of all relics, Mr. Sahba planned a spaceous archives room in the Information Centre building which could accommodate more cabinets to display all relics. After completion of Information Centre construction all archival material was transferred to the special room which made it possible for comfortale viewing by groups of believers.

Accoustics

Of major concern was the acoustics in the prayer hall. Domed structures do normally pose audibility problems due to sound echo. Our situation was compounded by the fact that the prayer hall, a huge concrete dome with marble and mosaic flooring, had no absorbent surfaces. Sound waves, bouncing off the hard surfaces all round, caused endless reverberations. A secondary problem was the delayed sound effect due to the distance from the sound source to the farthest point in the prayer hall. If the floor was carpeted and inner surfaces of the structure faced with sound absorbent material the reverberations could be reduced. Neither being approved by Mr. Sahba, means had to be devised to reduce the echo phenomenon to the minimum. Mr. Charles Nolley, a Bahá'í accoustics specialist from USA came

especially to design an appropriate sound system. After numerous tests he installed a series of specially calibrated amplifiers, with matching speakers concealed under bench seats.

Electrification

Electrification of the buildings and grounds required special attention. To receive and distribute the heavy electrical load, a sub-station, conforming with stringent DESU specifications needed to be provided. The transformer to convert the 11,000 volt high-tension power supply down to 440 volts was installed in the basement of the main building. Necessary electrical cabling completed, lamp fittings for all areas were selected by Mr.Sahba and Mr. Ashraf. Flood-lighting of the superstructure was designed by Philips, the reputed Dutch lamp manufacturers. Special metal-halide lamps were imported for the purpose. The external illumination design won an international award in 1987.

Landscaping

As magnificent as the Temple building was, so had its environment to be green and serene. Landscaping the grounds therefore was important. The formidable task was to transform a barren rock-strewn estate, denuded of all trees, and with virtually no top-soil, into a befitting garden that would enhance the beauty of the Temple building. Mr Sahba seized the opportunity to consult Mr. Richard St. Barbe Baker, a Bahá'í and founder of the worldwide Society of the Friends of the Trees. Mr. Baker was in Delhi at the invitation of the Indian government for consultation on afforestation programmes in the country. Upon alighting from the car at the Temple estate that hot May morning in 1980, a sigh escaped Mr. Baker's lips. He looked down on the ground, and then his eyes wistfully surveyed the stark, desolate estate. The only greenery was the dozen or so wild thorny *babul* bushes. "Alas" he said sadly, "this area was once a forest." But Richard St. Barbe Baker, a visionary whose dream was to afforest the Sahara Desert, would not be discouraged. Admitting that the area was rocky and eroded of topsoil, with scarce water, he asserted it could and should be made green, no matter how difficult. He said fruit trees could be planted, variety of decorative and flowering plants grown, and suggested Ficus Religiosa, the peepal or bodhi tree, considered sacred by Hindus and Buddhists, be the theme tree.

A small area of land was bounded off in 1983 for starting a nursery, and a gardener was employed. Although no landscaping plan had yet been visualized, certain plants identified by Mr. Sahba, were to be grown from cuttings and seeds for transplanting in locations to be planned. The one tube well with low water-yield was used for the nursery. Before long a patch of green appeared on the dry estate. The resourceful gardener brought cuttings of decorative plants like bougainvillea of different colours at no cost. Mr. Sahba planned a green wall of tall, stately *Ashoka* trees along the southern boundary parallel to the road. *Ashoka* plants, two to three feet high, were procured and planted. Bougainvillea plants were planted along the eastern, western, and northern boundaries. The contractor's labour strike in April 1983 resulted in a lock-out and ended landscaping activity.

Plants in the nursery were donated to the Bahá'í cemetery.

When work resumed in January 1984, the top priority naturally was to remobilize the site and get the Contractor's new team of engineers and labour to proceed with vital construction work. Landscaping was also given due attention. The basic requirement was a minimum six-inch layer of topsoil over the entire estate. Over several months, hundreds of truck-loads of earth, excavated from house-building sites in the neighbourhood, were dumped on the grounds and labour employed to spread the earth. On Sundays when the labour observed their weekly holiday, youthful Bahá'í volunteers attending dawn prayers, joyfully assisted in the landscaping work. Called the Temple Brigade, they came every Sunday. After dawn prayers, the ladies swept and swabbed the buildings clean, while shovel-wielding young men spread and leveled the earth over the grounds. The strenuous two-hour exercise each week ended in a hearty breakfast, achieved much, and bred a wonderful spirit of camaraderie. It inculcated in the youth a sense of responsibility and involvement with the Temple. Sunday mornings were well-spent and thoroughly enjoyed by all.

Mr. Sahba and Mr. Ashraf consulted horticulturists and prepared a landscape design. The monsoon season of 1984 signalled the first real gardening activity. A locally available hardy grass was selcted for the lawns and obtained as cuttings, free of cost, from neighbouring parks. A team of gardeners was employed to plant the grass in the freshly spread and manured earth. Hour after hour the gardeners dug lightly into the earth, lifting it slightly, pressing into it small bunches of grass and tapping it down. Monsoon showers did the rest. Soon the estate was garbed in lush green. That was the beginning. Now trees and decorative plants had to be selected, procured and planted. The immediate as well as future landscaping activity, the care and maintenance of gardens called for the appointment of an experienced full-time supervisor. A graduate horticulturist, Mr. Rajbal Singh, was appointed. With a small band of casual labour he dug the pits for planting the trees in accordance with the landscape design. He marked out straight lines, and measured the distances between plants accurately. Where planned distances of pits fell over hard rocky areas, the rock was excavated to maintain symmetry, straight lines and equal distances of the plants. Dug pits were filled with earth and manure, ready to receive the first avenue plants. Naw-Ruz of 1985, 21st March, was the auspicious day when the first of the innermost row of plants, Thooja Compacta, locally called Moharpankhi, was planted by Mrs. Gloria Faizi. Planting of the first row of avenue plants was completed by gardeners the same day.

The next outer row along the walkway was China Orange plants. In accordance with the landscape design Ficus Kadamba, Alestonia, Royal Palm, and Bottle Brush were planted in their designated places. The Services Block was ringed with Jacaranda and Champa. A row of Gul Mohars was planted parallel to and at a little distance from the Ashoka trees earlier planted along the southern boundary wall. Triangular beds were created on both sides of the main walkway to serve as flower-beds. Colourful seasonal flowers like phlox and pansies of various hues would present a pleasing sight during the winter dedication period. Those would be replaced with hardy China Roses and Vynka, which could withstand the hot dry summer season.

Completion Certificate

By mid-1986 the Temple building stood complete in all its grandeur. DDA rules stipulated completion of every building be verified and certified by them to conform to approved plans before its occupation and usage. A completion certificate from the DDA was also vital because without this all-important document the Municipal Corporation would not authorise sewerage connections, nor would the electricity company provide power connections. Ironically, issue of the completion certificate depended upon clearances from the Municipal Corporation, the electricity company, and the fire department. It does sound like chasing one's own tail, and it was. The plumbing, sanitary, and sewerage systems installed in the building had to be inspected and approved by the concerned department of the Municipal Corporation. The electrical equipment and systems, had similarly to be checked and approved by the electricity company. The Delhi fire brigade had to certify that the building was free from fire hazards. Finally DDA engineers had to inspect the building and certify construction to be exactly as per sanctioned plans. Only without these four clearances could the completion certificate be obtained.

Obtaining approval of plumbing and sewerage installations was easy. Providentially, the officer in charge was the same engineer, recently transferred from the water department, whom we had befriended. He was sympathetic and helpful. The requisite drawings were submitted and he was requested to arrange early inspection of the installations. He studied the drawings and asked one question. Were the installations exactly as per drawings? Of course they were, we confirmed. The officer stamped and signed his approval on the drawings. That was the measure of his trust.

After a spate of fires in high-rise buildings in Delhi, and the loss of many lives the fire department had newly clamped stringent safety conditions for approval of buildings taller than 15 metres. Our application for clearance drew initial refusals. Merely noting that the Temple structure was taller than 15 metres, we were asked to install fire alarm systems, water sprinklers, and other stipulated safety measures. Explanations that we had taken adequate safety measures, that our building was by no stretch of imagination a multi-storeyed building, to which the new rules could apply, fell on deaf ears. The officers focussed only on the height criteria and insisted upon the measures stipulated for high-rise buildings. We were

barely three months away from the dedication date and were losing precious time. In desperation we approached the Chief Fire Officer. Unrolling the drawings before him we explained that the building was a tall, domed, single storeyed structure; that it could in no way be described as multi-storeyed because of its height. Measures adopted for fire prevention and fire-fighting were detailed. What impressed him most was the fact that we had installed a 20 horse power, multi-stage pump that could deliver water at high pressure to any part of the building. Furthermore, that the electrically operated pump could switch to diesel operation in the event of power failures. No system stipulated by the fire department could operate without electricity, whereas our system could. The installation of this special pump was the greatest protection against fire, since no fire tender could come within a hundred metres of the Temple building because of the surrounding pools. These explanations registered with the Chief Fire Officer. To remove the last vestige of doubt we invited him to inspect the building personally.

The next day, the Chief Fire Officer, with two junnior officers, visited the Temple. Inspection of the building, its environs, fire-prevention and fire-fighting systems, the large metre-deep pools filled with water available for fire-fightng left them dumb-founded. "*Where*" he asked his officers *"is the fire hazard in this building? Where are the plans? I will personally approve them."* And he did. Over cups of tea in the office, he had the drawings stamped, and signed them himself. The Chief Fire Officer became a close friend and admirer of the Temple.

Obtaining electricity connection was more difficult. The extraordinarily heavy 426 KW electrical load we had applied for could only be given from an 11,000 volts high-tension power line. This involved several departments of the electricity company. Numerous visits to their various offices, and inspection of our installations, eventually earned us their approval. The sub-station was energized on 9th December 1986, just a fortnight before dedication. That night Bahapur was a blaze of lights, with the building fully illuminated for the first time. And all the gardens were aglow.

With the three approvals in hand, the final building inspection hurdle remained to be crossed. The DDA buildings department was persuaded to arrange immediate inspection. This work is normally delegated to a JE – Junior Engineer. As the delegated JE approached the building his gaze wandered around in utter amazement. What faced him was not a cubical building whose dimensions – length, breadth, and height - could be measured, and architectural details matched against the sanctioned plans. He glanced over the drawings and stood completely perplexed. From where could he start, and how could he measure the curvatured petals with the simple measure tape he was armed with? There was not a straight line in this building, save the floors and basement columns. Unwilling to admit his inablity to carry out inspection, he devised a face-saving exercise. He measured the boundaries of the estate, and found it tallied exactly with the drawings, almost to the centimeter. He offered to return with his senior engineer to complete the inspection.

He did return the following day with a senior engineer, who could do no more than his JE. He opined that a survey team, equipped with necessary instruments - dumpy level, theodolite.- would have to carry out a proper survey of the building. We offered the use of our instruments, which he declined. This was unacceptable. We were losing precious days because DDA engineers could not carry out measurements and verifications! It would take them weeks to organise a survey team, and we could not afford to lose another day. We approached the DDA Director (Buildings), explained the situation to him and requested his immediate personal visit. He agreed and arrived as promised, with a retinue of engineers. He walked along the walkway towards the building, his incredulous eyes glued to the magnificent edifice before him. Bengalis are a highly cultured community, with a rich heritage in the arts, music, and literature. The renowned Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore was the doyen of Bengal. This Buildings Director, a Bengali, and an engineer with an artistic temperament, fell under the spell of the Temple. Reaching the main entrance steps, he stopped. He needed to go no further. He turned to his engineers and asked, *"What are you trying to do? Apply the building code to the Taj Mahal? Give me the plans. I will sign them."* The JE promptly produced the drawings. The Director signed them with great aplomb. Invited to be taken around the building he excused himself for want of time, but promised to return with his family, saying "*My family must not be deprived*." The following Sunday he arrived with his family, and spent more than two hours to take in the beauty of the building, to understand its unusual features, and to learn about the Faith.

With the all important Completion Certificate in hand, electricity, water and sewerage connections were arranged, all things stood ready for the dedication.

DEDICATION CEREMONY

Preparations

Fully one year ahead of the projected Temple completion, the National Spiritual Assembly appointed a committee to plan and arrange its dedication. Mr. Sahba and I were included in order to facilitate co-ordination between committee and the construction team. The construction, projected to be completed by 1986 end, dedication could be arranged during the December – February period. The December-end option would coincide with Christmas and New Year holidays in the Western world and enable large numbers of Bahá'í s from those countries to participate, but the cold weather, it was feared, might deter Indian participation. Another factor to be considered was that December being the height of the Indian tourist season, foreign participants might not be able to avail of off-season discounts on air fares and hotel tariffs. Airline and hotel reservations too might present problems. All things considered, the December-end option was approved and confirmed by the National Spiritual Assembly.

The dedication and conference dates fixed, many action fronts opened up. Policy decisions on main issues were taken and sub-committees, each

including one dedication committee member, were entrusted with the responsibility to gather information, make in-depth studies of all aspects of the dedication ceremony and conference, and offer recommendations to the Committee. Experienced Bahá'í event managers Mrs. Eileen Norman and Mr. Tony Pelle from the U.S., graciously offered their voluntary services. They arrived in Delhi three months in advance, checked all arrangements, finalised logistics, and micro-detailed every aspect of the dedication service and conference. Mr. Arthur Thomson and Mr. Nari Sherwani, from Australia and UK respectively, also came to Delhi in response to the invitation of the Committee, and were of immense help.

All set about their tasks with earnestness and enthusiasm, determined to make the dedication ceremony and conference a memorable and enjoyable event. Within the set time lines, sub-committees came up with necessary information and proposals. The first thing that came to light was that clearance from the Religious Affairs Department of the Police was mandatory. A formal application was personally submitted to the officer-in-charge, whose many questions were answered and necessary information provided. The submission-cum-interview was followed by a visit to the Temple and office of the National Spiritual Assembly by police officers. Enquiries complete, the police granted their formal clearance.

Following the formal announcement of the Temple dedication ceremony and conference to the Bahá'í world, a colourful flyer, with all information regarding registration procedures, hotel reservations, alternate accommodation, and weather conditions, was circulated through Bahá'í institutions world wide. An attached tear-away slip was provided for intending participants to fill out and post back.

A registration cell was appointed to receive and process responses received. Arrangements were made for different types of accommodation, and rooms were reserved in various grades of hotels and guest houses. A "tent-village" was erected for the sizable number that preferred economy class accommodation. The registration cell became the first contact point of the dedication committee and conference participants. They did a splendid job of receiving guests, issuing identity badges, guiding them to pre-allotted accommodation, and patiently answering their queries. From the early response it became apparent that interest in the Temple and its dedication had been grossly underestimated. Instead of the anticipated three thousand, arrangements would be required for almost three times that number. The only suitable venue for the conference to follow the dedication was the Indira Gandhi indoor sports stadium. Fortuitously the stadium was free during the winter season and could be rented for the conference.

The programme sub-committee had the most delicate and crucial responsibility, which it discharged admirably. Readings and chants were to be selected for the dedication ceremony. Bahá'ís with reading and chanting talents from the international Bahá'í community, and from among the participants, had to be identified. Besides, the most stirring parts of the dedication ceremony being the choral renderings of the Holy Writings in Hindi, English and Persian, three separate choirs needed to be organized.

Renowned Indian musician Pandit Ravi Shankar put selected Bahá'í Writings to choral music, and Mr. Asit Desai trained the Hindi choir. The reputed Austrian violinist and conductor, Mr. Bijan Khadem-Missagh trained and conducted the Persian choir, while well known Australian musician, Mr. Tom Price took charge of the English choir. The highlight of the dedication ceremony was to be the soul stirring choral renderings of Holy Writings. Beside the dedication ceremony programme, subjects and speakers had to be selected for the three-day conference. Voluminous correspondence was exchanged with the proposed speakers, including several Hands of the Cause of God, before the programme was finalized. The Universal House of Justice confirmed that Hand of the Cause of God, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum would represent that august Body at the dedication.

A sub-committee in charge of inviting prominent non-Bahá'ís to the dedication ceremony submitted its list of invitees, which included important government officials, ambassadors of various countries, heads of religious communities and organisations, and prominent personalities. The list was reviewed to ensure it was representative, and invitations were posted or personally delivered. The response was almost one hundred percent. Only invitees out of station regretted their inability to attend. The number of ambassadors of different countries, and religious leaders in attendance made the dedication ceremony reminiscent of a United Nations conference. The Lt. Governor of Delhi, accompanied by his wife, were among the first to arrive.

Security was a major concern and a sensitive issue, what with the number of important personalities attending the functions. A voluntary task force was raised from among Bahá'í youth, and specially trained to provide security cover at all events at the Temple, the conference venue, and tent-village. Assisting them was a band of volunteer Bahá'í ushers and guides at all venues.

Another sub-committee that performed admirably was the one charged with the responsibility of making available Bahá'í publications in foreign and regional Indian languages, Temple posters and post cards, and other memorabilia such as marble plaques, carvings of the Greatest Name, etc.

The logistics of transportation was mind-boggling. Guests had to be transported from their places of residence in hotels, guest houses or the tent village, between the Temple and conference venue. Back and forth went the buses to an exacting schedule. The sub-committee in charge of transport arrangements worked indefatigably and invisibly. They moved the thousands of guests from their various accommodation locations to conference venues, to and fro, at regular intervals. A remarkable job was done and none missed out on any programme or activity for want of timely transport.

The most arduous responsibility was that of the volunteers who would man the shoe-room. Three thousand guests were expected to attend each of the three dedication ceremonies. It was a super-human task to receive and

store, in numbered pigeon-holes, within the cramped space of the underground shoe-room, that many pairs of footwear of every description and size, and to return them to their rightful owners at lightning speed without a mistake. And for this work there could be no rehearsal. Everyone knew what had to be done, and they would have to perform with great efficiency and speed.

Dedication Ceremony

The morning of 24th December 1986 in Delhi was cold and foggy. Excitement filled the air at Bahapur. This was the day and the event which some nine thousand Bahá'ís from India and from around the globe had come to witness. The fog began to lift as the first rays of the sun touched upon the glistening petals of the Temple superstructure. The entire building was immaculately clean and ready to welcome the first guests. The lawns sparkled with dew in the morning sun. Phlox and pansies along the walkways were in full bloom, in a blaze of colour. The walkways and steps were lined with chains of bright marigold flowers. By 7 a.m. the maintenance staff had completed their work, and were warming up with a cup of tea. Soon the various task force members - ushers, guides, security – arrived for their final briefing and were apportioned their stations and duties.

The dedication ceremony was to be repeated thrice as only three thousand people could be seated in the prayer hall at a time. Colour coded passes determined which of the three functions the participants could attend. All non-Bahá'í invitees were privileged to attend the first ceremony.

An hour ahead of commencement of the first ceremony, the arrival of bus-loads of eager Bahá'ís, created a colourful and festive atmosphere. Bahapur came alive with radiant, joyful people of all ages and backgrounds – Asian, American, African, Australian and European – greeting and chatting excitedly in different languages, as they walked towards the Temple building. Their colour-coded passes checked, they were ushered into the prayer hall. The first invitees started arriving by 8.30 a.m. The guests were received and guided up the walkway, towards the prayer hall. Having to remove their shoes was a surprise for some foreign dignitaries, although that was recognised as an Indian tradition, and not a Bahá'í ritual. Cloth slip-ons were provided to those who preferred to wear them. Among the first invitees were the Lt. Governor of Delhi and his wife. Guests were ushered to their reserved seats. The prayer hall filled up slowly and silently. With bated breath all waited. There was a flurry as heads turned to see the guest of honour and representative of the Universal House of Justice, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum, enter the prayer hall. Immediately following her were Hands of the Cause of God Mr. William Sears and Mr. Collis Featherstone. And then entered members of the Hindi, English and Persian choirs with their respective conductors. The historic moment had arrived.

Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum, radiant and with regal dignity, dressed gracefully in a colourful saree, stepped up to the podium, and presented the

profoundly stirring message of the Universal House of Justice. *"On behalf of the Supreme Body of the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice, I have the great honour of dedicating this Mother Temple of the Indian sub-continent to public worship. Conceived in the hearts of a handful of early Bahá'ís in Bombay, in 1920, who petitioned Abdu'l-Bahá, the Head of their Faith, the Son of its Founder, Bahá'u'lláh, that a Temple be raised in His Name in India; blessed from its very inception, almost seventy years ago, by Abdu'l-Bahá, Who prayed that by the Will of God, a majestic Mashriqu'l-Adhkár – literally "the dawning place of the mention of God" – should be erected in one of the central cities of India; confirmed in this mighty enterprise by the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith himself, who stipulated that this Temple be erected in New Delhi, and made the purchase of its site one of the goals of his world-encompassing Ten Year Crusade; initiated through a message from the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world in 1974, conveying the glad tidings that the construction of the historic House of Worship in this part of Asia would be commenced during the coming five years and all the preliminaries and excavations be completed within that period; reared through the sacrificial contributions, not only of Indian Bahá'ís, but fellow believers from every country and major island of the globe, now this glorious marble lotus, this exquisite symbol of the purity, beauty, perfection and mercy that comes to all men from the Creator, enfolds us tenderly in her heart, bidding us unite in peace, welcoming within her doors people of all creeds, all races, all nations and all classes, and proclaiming to all men that this Temple is dedicated to the three fundamental verities animating and underlying the Bahá'í Faith – the unity of God, the unity of His Prophets, the unity of mankind.*

I greet and welcome you within these walls on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, and invite you to share with us the Words recorded in the Sacred Scriptures which we believe to be repositories of the eternal and fundamental truths revealed by God in various ages for the guidance and salvation of all mankind."

Having presented that weighty and historic message, Rúhiyyih Khánum declared the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár open. From that moment on, only the Holy Writings, the recorded words of Holy Scriptures, could be read or recited within its portals. On cue, the Hindi choir burst into a celestial chant, followed by a resonant rendering of the *Gayatri Mantra*. Readings from the Bible, Bhagavad Gita, Dhamapada, Gathas, Quran, and Bahá'í Holy Writings were interspersed by stirring choral renderings, in Hindi, English and Persian. With two hundred voices raised in praise and thanksgiving to God, without instrumental accompaniment, the atmosphere was spiritually charged. The hall resounded with their melodious refrain, transporting listeners to heavenly realms.

The programme over, all waited for Rúhiyyih Khánum to lead the invitees out of the prayer hall. Bahá'í s remained seated, some praying, some looking heavenward at the symbol of the Greatest Name in the dome, some just staring in awe and wonder. All happy for having shared in the rare privilege of witnessing the birth of a potent Institution of Bahá'u'lláh. They made a reluctant exit after the last of the invitees had left. The programme

was repeated the same afternoon and evening, for the remaining six thousand eager Bahá'ís.

Overwhelmed by the momentous event, Rúhiyyih Khánum faxed her feelings to the Universal House of Justice: "*Inestimable privilege attend all three packed services heart of Lotus Temple."*

Christmas-eve of 1986 will be recorded in gold in the annals of Bahá'í history, as the day on which the House of Worship of the Indian sub-continent was inaugurated. The aspiration of Indian Bahá'ís, expressed more than sixty years earlier, was happily fulfilled. The spiritual heritage of India was enriched, India's destiny changed that day.

Having thoroughly enjoyed the uplifting, celestial renderings of the three choirs, Rúhiyyih Khánum met them in the library and expressed her appreciation to the choir members saying: *"Today, in this House of Worship, I can begin to appreciate the meaning of Bahá'í choir and the true value of having only the human voice in the prayer hall in Bahá'í Temples. I am grateful to each one of you. It was truly a heavenly performance."*

Dedication Conference

The dedication conference was held at the Indira Gandhi indoor athletics stadium, the largest available hall in Delhi, to accommodate some nine thousand Bahá'ís. The first session on 24th December morning was co-chaired by Counsellors Mrs. Shirin Boman and Dr. Iraj Ayman. The welcome address by Chairman of the National Spiritual of India, Mr. Kishen Khemani was followed by a roll-call of nations. With the announcement of the name of each country a single representative walked up to the stage. A thunderous applause filled the stadium when the tally revealed representation from 114 countries, territories and islands of the world. The congregation gave a rousing, standing ovation to the esteemed Hands of the Cause of God, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum , Collis Featherstone and William Sears, as they were introduced and invited on the stage. Spirits were buoyed up by the vibrant presentation of the theme song of the conference "Forever in Bloom" by poet and musician couple Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Shoemaker, followed by an informative audio-visual presentation on the Temple construction by Mr. Sahba. A brief devotional break followed, after which Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum presented the following special message of the Universal House of Justice. *"With feelings of intense joy and humble gratitude we hail congregation followers Bahá'u'lláh assembled in thousands from east and west on this memorable occasion inauguration Mother Temple Indian Sub-continent. This magnificent edifice raised Asiatic continent, cradle principal religions mankind, just dedicated for public worship, is befitting tribute to Bahá'u'lláh, Glory of God, testifying to His unfailing promises, manifold blessings and abiding protection vouchsafed generations His devoted followers who responded to His call, toiled in His vineyard, offered their lives in path of His love, sacrificed their comfort, wealth and position to promote His Cause, establish His institutions and unfurl His banner of unity and tranquility amongst mankind.*

Outstanding achievements recent past when, thanks to courage,

steadfastness and self-abnegation Bahá'í community land its birth, Faith Bahá'u'lláh, has dramatically attracted world-wide attention, when communities Greatest Name have resolutely crossed threshold fourth epoch Formative Age Bahá'í Dispensation, when National Spiritual Assemblies, as evidence their maturation have, for the first time, devised and embarked upon major teaching plans as parts international enterprise, these achievements now crowned with signal victory completion Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Delhi, from which praise of God will resound throughout world, confer particular blessing continent Asia, which has for so many years been deprived of this divine institution.

These successive victories bestowed upon small but vigorous Bahá'í community, animated by Holy Spirit, assured of unbounded confirmations from on high and motivated by love of Beloved of the world and Desire of the nations, will be step nearer glorious future presaging still greater triumphs Bahá'í community, which will draw upon its hidden and great potential in promoting Faith, and conferring immortal fame servants Blessed Beauty. We earnestly renew our fervent plea to those participating this festive occasion, as well as to all Bahá'is around the world, to arise in thanksgiving, consecrate themselves to arduous but eternally rewarding services to the Cause of God and consecrate their efforts and resources to execution and triumphant conclusion projected historical venture during critical brief years separating us from centenary ascension Bahá'u'lláh ."

The morning session of the second day of the conference on 25th December, co-chaired by Mrs. Shirin Fozdar and Dr. Singara Velu, began on a sad note. The keynote speaker of the day was to be the Hand of the Cause of God Mr. Dhikrullah Khadem, who had passed away just five weeks earlier. His speech on "The station of the Universal House of Justice" was presented by his wife Mrs. Javidukht Khadem. The message was tearfully received with rapt attention, following which was another solemn event. Two representatives of the National Spiritual of the Bahá'í s of Iran, bore into the hall a vase full of fragrant red roses. The vase, a priceless gift from the Universal House of Justice to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, was of exquisitely carved Iranian silver. The two hundred and four red roses in the vase, represented the two hundred and four precious lives sacrificed at the altar of faith in the wave of persecution of Bahá'ís in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution. A solemn silence fell upon the stadium and supercharged the auditorium, as the precious gift, with roses, was borne to the stage. The more than eight thousand participants, awed and overcome, stood with heads bowed to honour the steadfast in faith. An angelic chant rent the air with a stirring Persian prayer. Tears flowed freely from eyes focussed on the roses, seeing in each bloom a radiant face, a heroic martyr, a faithful friend, a steadfast believer, a loving father or brother, a doting wife, mother or daughter. During those moments of pregnant silence, names, faces, and accounts of the heroism of those beloved of God flashed across the minds of relatives, friends, and colleagues. It was a long, long while before the conference programme could proceed and it could well be said, that vase of roses was the cynosure of all eyes, cast a spell upon the conference and spiritualized the congregation.

The highlight of the afternoon session, chaired by Mr. Douglas Martin, was a review of the progress of the Cause in India by Counsellor Mrs. Zena Sorabjee, and in Asia by Counsellor Victor Samaniego, with an overview of the world progress by Counsellor Dr. Peter Khan.

Judge James Nelson from USA chaired the morning session of the third day, the highlight of which was a stirring talk by Hand of the Cause Collis Featherstone on "The need for Spiritual Values", reinforced by Counsellor Mr. Afshin's "Sacrifice – Essence of Service to the Cause". The final session, chaired by Counsellor Bharat Koirala, was dedicated to the youth and children. The large number of children enjoyed a conference of their own at another venue.

THE LOTUS BECKONS

The dedication ceremony and subsequent conference at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium received unexpected print and electronic media coverage. Hindi, English and regional language newspapers published lavish articles and reports with photographs. The national TV channel broadcast news and views. Suddenly the sub-continent, and the world knew of our magnificent Mashriqu'l-Adhkár , the Lotus Temple or *Kamal Mandir*, as it was popularly called. Despite announcements of it's public opening date, multitudes flocked to see it, only to learn that its portals would be opened to the public on 1st January 1987. Each passing day brought larger and larger crowds, often difficult to control, and to turn away. During the six days following the dedication, admission was restricted only to Bahá'í participants in the dedication ceremony and conference.

At last D-Day was upon us. Braving the cold, people started arriving at the Temple gate a full hour ahead of opening time. The crowd swelled and by 9 o'clock the road in front of the entrance gate was completely blocked. The crowd, growing by the minute and the people in front, being pressed against the gates, were getting restive. How were we going to control this river of humanity about to burst through the flood gates? A stampede appeared imminent. How would we, a hand full of security and maintenance staff, control the huge crowd?

Telephone calls to the office of the National Spiritual Assembly and Bahá'ís living nearby brought reinforcements to help the appointed volunteers and also brought additional Bahá'í literature for distribution. Volunteers were stationed at key locations, and as more Bahá'ís arrived, they were similarly deployed. Their role was to maintain complete silence in the prayer hall and a semblance of order outside. It was almost 9.30 and the flood was ready to burst through. We braced ourselves for the stampede. Armed with a bull-horn, I welcomed the throng and touching upon their religious sentiments, appealed for orderly behaviour. And strangely, the stampede was thwarted, but not because of my plea. As the Muhajir Gate swung slowly open, the first to enter were some thirty sari-clad ladies, led by one with a harmonium slung over her shoulders, followed by others with drums, brass cymbals, and conches. The conches sounded as they stepped on to the walkway, then the harmonium, to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals, played out the first notes of a popular *bhajan* (spiritual song) The rest of the ladies then

joined in a full-throated chant, one among them dancing her way to the front, as if in a trance. This was a ladies *bhajan mandali* (spiritual song group) Their presence was fortuitous. The crowd followed the *bhajan* singing group in order, in reverence. It was a heart-warming sight.

The bhajan singing stopped half-way along the walkway. Now people pressed to get ahead to reach the Temple. A bottle-neck was created at the shoe-room where people queued up to check-in their footwear. The impatient just left their footwear on the walkway and proceeded towards the main entrance steps. None had anticipated such crowds or such enthusiasm. The leading group was assembled in front of the ancillary building and told by whom and why the Temple was built. On the first landing they were apprised about Bahá'í belief in the oneness of religion and the non-communal nature of worship in the Temple. At the third stop on the podium, the elements of the building were described, and the symbolism of the lotus was explained. Finally at the entrance to the prayer hall, pleading for total silence inside, they were ushered into the prayer hall. This system was to be a relay effort, with group after group, making the same stops and being given information at each stage. But it became unmanageable with wave after wave of groups to be briefed. Eventually we contented ourselves with just maintaining order and silence. This became easier with the arrival of more Bahá'ís who took up positions as impromptu ushers and guides.

The uninterrupted flow of humanity continued hour after hour, ceaselessly until 5.30 p.m. when the gates were closed in the face of a host of disappointed people pleading for admission. We had no heart to drive out the large number of visitors still inside the prayer hall and on the grounds. Many stood around watching the sun set behind the Temple, and then taking in the breath-taking beauty of the flood-lit building, sparkling like a heavenly gem. The Temple had well and truly cast it's spell upon the people of Delhi.

With the departure of the last of the visitors, the impromptu volunteer force gathered at the main entrance steps, excitedly sharing experiences. On their feet for more than eight hours none, young or old, felt any fatigue. The sheer joy and excitement of receiving and guiding visitors around the Temple through the day had been so exhilarating that no thought of rest or need for lunch or tea had passed through any mind. If the first day in the public life of our Temple was any indication, years of excitement awaited the lucky ones who would serve the millions that would be attracted by the Divine Lotus in the years ahead.

Following the Temple dedication, the newly appointed Management Committee assumed its responsibilities and initiated necessary measures. Two co-ordinators were made responsible for the two areas of management - Bahá'í activities and estate maintenance. Each co-ordinator appointed and briefed staff, full-time and voluntary, to take care of office administration, guide and usher visitors, attend to building and estate maintenance, security, house-keeping, gardening, et al.
The opening day lesson well-learned, arrangements were hurriedly made for

the better reception of visitors who came each day in their thousands. It appeared as if *kamal mandir* had endeared itself to the heart of all Delhi. Visitors and worshippers came in droves, hour after hour, all day long, endlessly. Young and old, rich and poor, alone and in family groups, they kept coming. They walked reverently along the walkways, their gaze focused upon the immaculate edifice before them and the vast gardens and greenery around them. On display was the nobility of their souls, the rich spiritual heritage of Indians. It was touching to see many kissing the steps, or touching the steps with their foreheads as they climbed towards the prayer all. Those were not visitors. They were pilgrims, their hearts filled with devotion. Many came bearing traditional offerings of flowers, coconuts, and incense sticks to place before deities they expected to find in the Temple. But in this *kamal mandir* they found no idols to make offerings to, no photographs to garland, no bells to ring. Here no rituals were performed, and priests were conspicuous by their absence. Most significantly, the donation box, prominently displayed in other places of worhip, was nowhere in sight, for here donations were not accepted.

The reaction and behaviour of visitors was interesting. As they entered the prayer hall, all idle chatter stopped, a reverent silence was maintained spontaneously. What the visitor saw was a marble-terrazzo floored circuler hall, surrounded by magnificent marble-clad arches, and elegant wooden benches arranged in arcs. A lectern, with microphones attached, faced the benches. The visitor's eyes rove around the prayer hall and its massive dome of criss-crossing concrete shells. In the top of the dome is noticed a symbol in brass, the only adornment in the building. The solemn atmosphere and quietude beckons the visitor to take a seat. He closes his eyes, and is out of this world as he meditates. The silence is broken by a melodious chant. He opens his eyes, sees a young lady chanting verses from the Bhagavad Gita. Then steps up a young man to recite from the Quran, followed by readings from the Bible, Gathas, Dhamapada, and Bahá'í Holy Writings. No explanations or elaborations of the readings are offered. Only the revealed Words are presented. The selected readings are on a single theme, and they say the same thing in different words and languages. The visitor is inclined to believe the writings are from a single divine source. This is the first ever experience of non-communal worship, without priests and sans rituals. He leaves the prayer hall, spiritually uplifted, inexplicably refreshed, but contemplative. Was there really only one God? And were Krishna, Buddha, and other prophets all God's Manifestations? Could mankind be united as one family? And why not? If everyone put aside traditional prejudices of religion, caste, race and nationality, all differences would vanish, all hatred and animosity would be history, and fellow-countrymen and the world would be united. Love and justice would prevail. This was what had been taught since childhood – that whenever irreligion and injustice prevailed, God's Manifestation - Kalki Avatar, Maitreya Buddha, Shahbahram, Christ's return in the glory of the Father, Imam Mehdi - would appear to renew religion and rejuvenate mankind. And builders of the Lotus Temple, the Bahá'ís, believed Bahá'u'lláh was that promised nodal Manifestation promised in all scriptures.

That was the message going out from the sacred precincts of the Temple. The *kamal mandir* was performing a *kamaal* (miraculous) role, blending hearts, harmonizing aspirations, spreading love. It was diffusing the divine fragrances, kindling hope and faith in the hearts of the frustrated and forlorn. This was not the wishful imaginaion of this writer, but close observation of the thousands of visitors, and the unsolicited comments and opinions repeatedly expressed to him by hundreds of sincere people whose hearts were touched, their souls stirred. Many spoke of the peace and serenity experienced in the prayer hall, and all were full of praise for the cleanliness and order of the estate. The beauty of the gardens was highly appreciated. The flood-lighting of the Temple at night attracted avid attention. Indeed many stayed on the grounds long after closing hours to enjoy the beauty of the flood-lit edifice. Significantly, many sought permission, and were issued special entry passes to visit the Temple for private early morning prayers.

Security

Site security during construction and post-construction periods was a sensitive issue. During the construction period security was the responsibility of the Contractor. ECC sub-contracted security responsibilities to a reliable agency, whose guards were specially trained and urged to exercise maximum round-the-clock vigilance. A system of entry-exit passes was devised which allowed pass-holders only to enter the site to deliver goods and materials, etc. High watchtowers, manned by sentries, were erected along the borders to prevent unauthorized entry into the site from anywhere.

The construction areas and borders were flood-lit at night. A log was maintained of personal and vehicular entries and exits to and from the site. And to receive important officials and Bahá'í visitors, a reception cabin was installed at the site entrance, manned by a Bahá'í receptionist, who welcomed and guided visitors around the site or to meet concerned persons for official work. In order to leave Mr. Sahba undisturbed in his important work, all individuals wishing to meet him, beside the Contractor's staff, were screened and only if absolutely necessary, taken to meet Mr. Sahba. And just to keep all guards on their toes often surprise visits were made at night. During the restive days of labour trouble and strike, security vigil was tightened to prevent any acts of sabotage by disgruntled elements. In addition, Bahá'í volunteer guards kept prayerful vigil at night.

Security during the immediate pre-dedication days, with the influx of large numbers of eager Bahá'ís presented its own challenges. A hand-picked group of multilingual Bahá'í youth was trained to handle situations likely to arise at the Temple and tent-village that accommodated a large number of Indian Bahá'ís. At the Temple they were to function as disciplined ushers and guides, answer queries about the Temple building and estate, resolve simple problems and generally assist the enthusiastic Bahá'ís from all over the world. To this group of youth was added another elite team whose responsibility was to provide security to Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum, the Lt. Governor of Delhi, special invitees, religious leaders, diplomats and government officials. This elite team wore no uniform, sported official badges, functioned efficiently without formality, like courteous escorts.

Among this elite volunteer group was a young Indian Naval officer, Mr. Mohan Vijaya Kumar, a Bahá'í of long standing from Bombay, currently stationed in the port-city of Cochin in south India. He was young, energetic and filled the bill for a full-time security officer needed for the Temple. With little hope that he would disrupt his naval career, and all the benefits that went with his position, we sounded him anyway. To our pleasant surprise he readily agreed without enquiring about salaries and conditions. When advised to consider the matter, consult with his wife and then let us know, his reply remained in the affirmative. Upon return to his naval station he submitted his resignation to his incredulous superiors, who questioned the wisdom of throwing up a career with the Indian Navy to take up the job of a security officer at a temple. He stood his ground and called from Cochin requesting we meet admiralty officials in Delhi to expedite his retirement. Mr. Mohan Vijaya Kumar ably and conscientiously served the Temple for three decades.

From January 1987 we took over responsibility for Temple security. We interviewed several agencies and selected one, not because his quotation was by far the lowest, but because during the interview he admitted he had quoted a no-profit rate because he desired to serve the Temple. Content with income from other contracts he was genuinely pleased to be appointed for Temple security. So we had a dedicated security contractor and our own dedicated security officer to join us shortly. Mr. Kumar's responsibility extended beyond supervising the security contractor's work, but also maintaining order, keeping a special watch on any misbehaving elements among visitors, particularly those with known anti-Bahá'í views. He was to instill Bahá'í attitudes into the system – to single out visiting dignitaries, diplomats, and vsitors to whom special attention was due, and extend them special courtesies. The reliability and efficiency of our security system was demonstrated by the incident-free Temple site.

SPELL OF THE LOTUS

The river of humanity kept flowing to the Temple, unabated and in all seasons, often in floods. On normal days visitors averaged fifteen to twenty thousand. That number was more than doubled on week-ends. On festive occasions and national holidays the number swelled to fifty thousand and more. Wave after wave of humanity kept lapping the shores of the Temple. While the river of local visitors, individuals and families, kept flowing to the Temple, a significant development was noticed – the visit of organized groups. The Lotus Temple - *kamal mandir* - figured on the schedule of tourists visiting India. Travel and tourists agencies included a Temple visit in the schedule of their clients visiting the Taj Mahal and other places of historical interest in Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Udaipur, etc. Car and bus loads of tourists arrived daily from all parts of the world. But on the Temple premises they behaved not as tourists, but as pilgrims. Notable also were pilgrim groups returning home after their pilgrimage to the holiest of Hindu shrines of Badrinath and Kedarnath in the Himalayas. Among such pilgrim groups was a Maharashtrian couple from Mumbai with their elderly parents. They were visibly moved on attending a prayer service, and learning about the Bahá'í Faith. While taking leave, the elderly father of the couple suddenly bent low and touched my feet. Shocked, I lifted and

embraced him, and said I was nobody to be shown such reverence. His reply was stunning. He said respect was due to all those who served such a Temple. Bowing before or touching the feet is a traditional Hindu practice of showing respect to elders. Elders only bow before seers or gurus they venerate and idols of deities they worship. Never do elders touch the feet of the young as this person did. That was the measure of this old gentleman's reverence and regard for the Temple, and not for persons who served it.

Another welcome development was the visit of thousands of school children. Most of the hundreds of Delhi schools brought their students during school hours. It was heartening to receive bus-loads of uniformed students with their teachers, and to see their innocent faces light up on learning about the Temple. Often when students of two or three schools arrived together, the walkways were filled with eager, bright-faced children in different coloured uniforms, snaking their way in disciplined lines, towards the Temple building. Students were received in the conference hall, briefed and given information about the Temple and their interesting questions answered, before guiding them to the prayer hall. Often when the conference hall was occupied with one batch of students, other batches were assembled on the pool-side steps for briefing. And when their time permitted they were invited to short audio-visual shows.

Notable among schools that brought their students to the Temple was the American Embassy school. After the visit of one class, we were invited to the school to address all students and staff on the Temple building and it's role in spreading communal harmony.

Curiosity took many visitors to the spacious, well-furbished library, and were pleasantly surprised to find books on the scriptures of all revealed religions in numerous languages. They were excited to see Bahá'í publications in every Indian regional language, and introductory literature in more than two hundred of the 800 languages in which Bahá'í literature was published worldwide. They helped themselves to books of their choice and spent comfortable hours browsing through them. Many engaged the librarian, Mrs. Tuba Munje, in lively discussions.

Numerous were the architects, engineers, members of the construction fraternity, who showed keen interest in the unprecedented construction techniques developed and used to raise the monumental Temple building. Special arrangements were made to conduct and explain to interested groups of architects and engineers the special features of the building. On request from the Government Public Works Department, some one hundred senior engineers from different States attending an Engineers Conference in Delhi were taken on a guided tour of the Temple. An hour-long briefing session followed the tour when their numerous questions were answered on techniques and methods employed to raise the unusual structure and achieve distinctive finishes.

Mr. Holck-Larsen, Chairman and Managing Director of Messrs Larsen & Toubro Ltd. of which our Contractors were a subsidiary, followed the progress of our Temple construction with keen interest. He was proud of

the ECC work, and called the Bahá'í Temple their best work. Mr. Larsen visited the Temple on numerous occasions, and became a good friend of the Bahá'ís. Usually, prior information of his visits enabled us to receive him and accord him due respect. But sometimes he came incognito. Visiting unannounced on one occasion, he asked a Bahá'í volunteer "*Who built the Temple*?" On being told L & T had constructed the building, he introduced himself saying "*I am L!*"

Foreign Students

A call from the security office that rang alarm bells one morning was that three Persian-speaking, unshaven, informally-dressed young men, apparently coming straight from the airport, carrying heavy back-packs, had arrived at the Temple. They were welcomed by the security officer and advised to leave their back-packs at the security office. I identified them on the walkway as they stepped warily towards the Temple building. The three young men, perhaps college students, talked excitedly as they surveyed the estate in wonder, not aware that they were closely followed by a Persian speaking person. Their eyes, glued to the Temple building, as they progressed towards the shoe-room, they paid handsome tribute on the beauty of the Temple building in superlatives. They were heard to express amazement at the progress of the Bahá'í Faith in India. They checked in their shoes and strode up the stairway, walking reverently towards the prayer hall. They stopped momentarily and stared in wonder at the pools around the building. They entered the prayer hall, silently surveyed the scene, watching visitors and worshippers lost in silent prayer and meditation. They surveyed the scene, sat for some minutes, and were seen to silently express their appreciation in gestures to each other. Emerging from the prayer hall they circumambulated the building, walked down to the basement area, rambled around the pools and approached the book stall. They peered over the book titles, but were attracted by the picturesque Temple posters and colourful post cards. They each selected posters and cards to take back home to Iran. Suddenly one of then blurted out: "*We will be fried at Mehrabad (*Tehran*) airport if we are caught with these Bahá'í articles.*" Reluctantly they returned their selected items. The youngest of the three had second thoughts. He retrieved the items he had chosen, paid for them and said, *"I don't care what they do to me. I must take these to show my family and friends."* They were well-behaved, unprejudiced young men and left the Temple without a disparaging word. They were profuse in expressions of gratitude at the securty office as they collected their back-packs and departed. The three perhaps represented the well-educated, well-behaved, unprejudiced young generation, the hope of the glorious future of Iran, the country that mothered two Divine Revelations – Zoroastrian and Bahá'í .

Dawn Prayers

Moved by the spiritual ambience of the Temple and inspired by their visits, several people sought permission, and were issued special passes, to visit the Temple for private early morning prayers. One instance bears special mention. A young Hindu gentleman asked for an entry pass for dawn prayers. Two mornings later he arrived at 7a.m. with his wife and infant child. The family went up to the prayer hall and emerged a good half hour

later. On his way out he stopped to express his gratitude. Asked why he chose to come to pray at the Lotus Temple when there were other temples in the vicinity, he smiled, turned to his wife and child, and narrated his story. The couple were childless for over three years after their marriage and were desperate. They had consulted and followed every medical advice, prayed at many places of worship, performed pilgrimages and prescribed rituals, sought the help of astrologers, spared no money or effort, but they were not blessed with a child. Almost hopeless and as a last resort, they had prayed at the Lotus Temple. And they were happily blessed with their daughter.

Sacred Spot

Having received no response to our application for residence visa for Mr. Shahram Pourshafi who was to come from Australia to take over as Temple Maintenance Manager, I drove to the office of the Home Ministry of Government of India to check out. The long queue of people, in which I stood, for an entry pass to the office, moved slowly forward. The security officer took his time to write passes and enter visitor's names in his register. When there were some six people still ahead of me in the queue the officer announced the time was up. He closed his register, picked up his files and papers and emerged from behind his counter. I was unaware of the 4p.m. time deadline and was disturbed over the wastage of time and having driven the distance for nothing. On his way up, the officer saw me, and noting my disappointment, asked where I was from and what work I had with the Ministry. I told him I was from the Bahá'í Temple and I needed to go to the visa department. His attitude changed. He said *"You are from the Bahá'í Temple! You come from that sacred spot (*pavitra sthaan*), who can stop you? You don't need a pass. Please go up.*" The officer's degree of reverence for the Temple was deeply moving. And incredibly, the other people standing around raised no objection for the officer's partisan decision to allow me into the offices without a security pass.

Efarsons

Among the distinguished visitors to the Temple was the Dutch Ambassador. And thereby hangs a tale. In April 1987 M/s Philips India Ltd, a subsidiary of the giant Dutch electronics company, addressed a very unbusiness-like letter to their leading Dealer in Bombay - M/s Efarsons. The letter had nothing to do with their electronics trade, but contained a request that an invitation be extended to the Dutch Ambassador to visit the Bahá'í Temple. Efarsons was the family electronics business I managed with my younger brother Rustom, and our principal business was with Philips, with whose senior officials, Dutch and Indian, we had developed very cordial relations. The Philips letter was forwarded to me in Delhi. The request was confusing. The Temple was in Delhi, as was the Dutch Embassy. If the ambassador wished to visit the Temple he was most welcome. How was Efarsons, or Philips involved?

Armed with the Philips letter I called at the Dutch Embassy, and was introduced to His Excellency Mr. A. Van Der Willigen. An invitation was extended to him and his family, and his visit was scheduled. The

Ambassador preferred a private half-hour visit in the morning, before the Temple opened to the public. The ambassador and his wife arrived punctually on the appointed day. They were warmly received and shown around the building. They evinced such keen interest, both in the features of the building and in the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith that his scheduled thirty minutes visit stretched to over two hours. Over cups of tea, I enquired how Philips and Efarsons were involved in his Temple visit. It turned out that some weeks earlier the Dutch Managing Director of Philips, Mr. Guepen and his wife, had visited the Temple, and were so profoundly impressed, that the Temple had become the subject of conversation over lunch at the Ambassador's residence the same day. Having heard such lavish praise from his countryman, the Ambassador became interested, and wished to visit the Temple. Hence the wish expressed to Philips Managing Director, and the latter's letter to Efarsons, the only Bahá'ís he knew.

Keen interest in the Temple was evinced also by diplomats from foreign embassies in Delhi, as also visiting senior government officials. While some came unannounced, visits of others were by prior appointment with the offices of External Affairs and Home Ministries of the Government of India. Notable among foreign dignitaries and diplomats were the Dy. High Commisioner of U.K., the Chinese Ambassador accompanied by his wife, the Russian Defence Minister, Madam Irena Dobrynin, wife of Russian Ambassador to U.N., Mr. Kenneth Galbraithe, reputed American economist, and many others.

Temple Logo

As the Temple gained prominence and popularity, so did it attract commercial attention. Before long Temple pictures were found on match boxes, electrical goods packaging, etc.. A reputed manufacturer used the Temple to advertise their cement. An advertising agency, on behalf of a textile manufacturer, sought permission to shoot a two-minute advertisement film in front of the Temple. Permission refused, they offered a huge sum of money – Rs.200,000/-. Each time permission was refused, up went the ante! They just could not believe such generous offers could be spurned, but left appreciating our religious sentiments and principles.

There was also the instance of a film director from Madras who wanted to shoot a scene with the heroine dancing before the Temple building. His request was denied and his generous money offer was rejected. But he would not be thwarted. On the following day he strategically parked two buses on the roadside with the Temple building in full view. The heroine, atop one bus, performed her dance with the Temple in the background, and was filmed by the filming crew on the second bus. In the daring filming incident, when persuasion failed, threat of legal action to prevent display of the filmed dance sequence, elicited compliance. The scene was removed from the film. As the Temple design was registered as a trade mark, its commercial usage could be legally prevented.

Lotus in Bhutan

The picture of an unusual lotus-shaped building attracted the attention of a

young lady at a Sunday market in her town in Bhutan. She bought the picture and took it home. Her father was mesmerized by the beauty of the building, and was deeply impressed by the quotation it bore. *"The religion of God is to create love and unity; make it not the cause of enmity and discord."* He knew nothing of the Temple nor had he heard of the Bahá'í Faith, but he framed the picture and displayed it in his small shop. A customer, seeing the picture, remarked that on a recent trip to Delhi he had enjoyed a visit to the Lotus Temple in the picture. Impressed by the lavish praise of the beauty of the building and its serene ambience, the shopkeeper regretted he did not have the means to travel to Delhi, but wished to contact Temple officials. The customer gave him the address he had noted in his diary. The shopkeeper contacted the office of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India, enrolled in a correspondence course, and in time he and his entire family accepted the Bahá'í Faith.

Lotus in Europe

Invited to address a group of university students on the Bahá'í Faith in Maribor, Slovenia, in December 1992, I made mention of the Temple and my involvement in its construction. Suddenly a young lady interrupted me, came up and gave me a hug and kiss. Questioned for her impetuosity, she explained that on her recent visit to her sister, who worked at the Bulgarian embassy in Delhi, she had visited the Bahá'í Temple. And she was so deeply moved and enchanted that she felt impelled to show respect to anyone associated with that iconic Temple.

Another major surprise followed the next day. Word had spread about us in Maribor through some Bahá'í university students. My wife and I were invited by Slovenia's leading newspaper, *Vercer,* for an interview. Two days later a half-page write-up, with photographs introduced the *Bahá'í Lotusvo Tempio* to all Slovenia. This led to an invitation to present a slide-show on the Temple to a packed audience in the university library.

At the Austrian Winter School in December 2005, a Slovenian lady narrated how she accepted the Bahá'í Faith. She had attended a lecture by a non-Bahá'í Slovenian lady describing her tour of India. The tourist had visited and descried places of interest, including the Temple. She spoke in glowing terms of the magnificence of the building and its peaceful environs and displayed a colourful poster of the Temple to the audience. She also said she was pleasantly surprised to be offered free literature on the Temple in her native language – Slovenian. Hearing the Slovenian tourist's lavish such praise and seeing the Temple poster, led her to obtain literature and read exhaustively on the Bahá'í Faith. And there she was, a firm and dedicated Bahá'í at the Winter School, with her three children.

Lotus Offshoot - Varqa

The site worked six days a week, but my work of having reports to write, correspondence to attend to, funds to monitor, etc. could not be completed even in seven days. And we often worked nights during long concreting operations. It was work, work, work, and more work. The only respite we looked forward to was Thursday night after-dinner meetings at Mr. Sahba's residence to review articles for publication in Varqa. These were most

enjoyable marathon meetings, extending well past midnight. Often we got home in the wee hours of the morning, surprisingly not tired but refreshed.

Publication of Varqa, the Bahá'í children's Persian magazine, the brain-child of Mr. and Mrs. Sahba had ceased with their transfer from Iran. It was revived through their initiative with the successful publication of the magazine in English, Hindi, and Persian from Delhi, to the joy of the readership of children around the world. A Varqa team, including several members of the Temple construction team, became responsible to source interesting and educational articles for publication. Although articles from other writers were welcomed, it generally devolved upon the Varqa team to produce the bulk of the text that got to the press. Thought-provoking editorials were written by Mr. Sahba and Mrs. Sahba produced all the beautiful illustrations and caricatures. Others wrote interesting articles, hilarious and serious. A 'make-it-yourself' section was introduced and unending serials. A popular serial article named "Time Machine" invited young readers to enter a time capsule, press requisite time buttons, be transported to the required age and time, to learn about the conditions, history and teachings of different progressive revelations. Articles received for publication were read aloud for all to brain-storm over. Suggestions came fast and thick - outlandish, far-fetched, critical, imaginative, but without inhibition, because our avowed aim was to enrich the magazine, make it thoroughly enjoyable and spiritually uplifting for our readership – the pure-hearted children around the globe. Contributions and suggestions were approved, rejected, revised, all without any hurt feelings, because from the criticisms emerged a better end-product always, to the satisfaction of all. Often our enthusiasm ran away with us when we out-shouted each other. The sound of our hearty laughter must have carried several blocks away. These were meetings like no other, enjoyable and fruitful.

Missing Donation Box

If there is one thing common to most places of worship in India, it is the prominently placed donation box. The hurried dropping of cash in a donation box has come to be regarded as an act of obeisance and worship. And when a donation is not offered, devout souls feel their act of worship is incomplete. Not finding any donation box in the House of Worship, they are pleasantly surprised or disappointed to be told that no donations were accepted. Pleased are those who appreciate and cite this as one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Bahá'í Temple. Disappointed are those who wish to know why non-Bahá'ís are discriminated against, and only Bahá'í donations are accepted. They are however convinced of the necessity to sever the perceived connection between donating money and engaging in communion with God, and that acceptance of donations from the public perpetuated that false notion. Most visitors agreed and expressed their appreciation.

One prospective donor who would not be thwarted was an elderly Gujarati gentleman. Pleased as he was to be addressed in his native tongue, he introduced himself as a trustee of several temples and institutions, and expressed his desire to donate a sum of Rs.50,000/-. He was very

courteously informed that no donations were accepted. It took a half hour in the office, over a cup of tea, to explain and to convince the gentleman. He left saying this was the first experience in his life that a voluntary donation was refused. The impression that Bahá'ís had not built a beautiful Temple to attract donations was indelibly imprinted upon the heart of that noble and generous soul.

So deeply ingrained in the mind of some visitors to offer donations in places of worship that despite the absence of a donation box, and refusal to accept donations, some surreptiously throw coins in the pools, perhaps making a wish. Those coins are periodically gathered and donated to other charities.

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Memorable Events

First prayer meeting at Temple Site

The Universal House of Justice announced the passing of Hand of the Cause of God, Mr. Abul Qasim Faizi in Haifa, Israel on 18th November 1980. To honour the memory of one who dearly loved India, and visited as often as his travels permitted, the Bahá'í community of Delhi gathered at the Temple site for the first official prayer meeting on 23rd November 1980. Chairs were arranged on the freshly concreted floor of the south wing of the Ancillary Building. The community was present in full strength. Alas, instead of Mr. Faizi addressing and inspiring the gathered Bahá'ís, his eventful life and sacrificial services to the Cause of God were recalled, and prayers were offered for the progress of his soul in the Abha Kingdom

Zero Degree Arch

Every hour at the Temple was momentous, thrilling. Visibly the Temple was growing by the hour, right before our eyes. And yet, from amongst the most exhilarating moments and experiences, a unique event on 23rd April 1982, was the concreting of the arch whose crest faced the qiblih, the direction in which Bahá'ís turn during their obligatory prayers. Its concreting was preceded by a spiritually significant function. In the crest of this arch was to be laid a brick from the infamous *Siyah Chal* of Tehran - the dark, damp, vermin-infested dungeon where Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned for four months and where He experienced His divine calling, and also the marble foundation stone. The National Spiritual Assembly had held in safe-keeping a baked clay brick from the *Siyah Chal*, brought to India from Tehran in 1966. That important relic from the dungeon in whch Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned, was handed to the Temple Project. Also held at site was the marble Foundation Stone laid by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum in 1977. The Universal House of Justice advised both these relics be incorporated in the Temple building. And what better location than the crest of the arch facing the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh!

All site personnel, our own and contractor's teams of architects, engineers, supervisors, sub-contractors, etc., some three hundred persons, gathered on the podium, standing amidst the massive steel space-frame of the superstructure. Mr. Sahba asked me to explain in Hindi the importance of

the imminent event. The *Siyah Chal* brick and foundation stone were displayed prominently and their historical and spiritual significance explained. As the audience heard the brief account of the persecution and imprisonment of Bahá'u'lláh, a reverent silence descended upon the site. The shifting and shuffling movements ceased. Rapt attention was paid to every word, and it was evident that, at that moment those dear non-Bahá'ís shared the profound feelings and stirrings of Bahá'ís present. This was poignantly underscored when they all spontaneously removed their helmets and head-gear as a prayer was recited. All stood in silence as, first the *Siyah Chal* brick, and then the foundation stone, were handed up the staging to Mr. Izzat Hoseini, atop the arch. To the accompaniment of more prayers, the two relics were placed between the layers of steel reinforcement, exactly facing the *qiblih*, and secured with concrete around them. As Mr. Hoseini started climbing down the arch staging, helmets were donned again, and the site resounded with applause. The site came to life again. All personnel took up their respective positions. The whirring of concrete mixers filled the air; the tower crane swung back and forth, depositing bucket-loads of concrete on the arch; and the shrill whine of vibrators completed the musical cacophony.

The importance of the zero degree arch was enhanced by a second significant event on the eve of Temple dedication. At the behest of the Universal House of Justice, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum had brought the very precious gift of a small silver casket filled with dust from the Holy Shrines. On 23rd December 1986 Rúhiyyih Khánum climbed up the specially erected platform, assisted by Mr. Sahba, and placed the silver casket in the niche in the inner crest of the arch, facing the qiblih, in a very moving, prayerful ceremony. The presence of dust from the Shrines of the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh within its portals added immeasurably to the sanctity of the Temple. The zero degree arch now bears dust from the Holy Shrines, a brick from the siyah chal, and the marble foundation stone.

Muhajir Gate Dedication

On the eve of the Temple dedication ceremony two significant events were scheduled, but far from the public gaze. The first was a gathering at the Temple entrance gate when Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum addressed the small group of invitees, and named the entrance gate after late Hand of the Cause of God, Dr. Muhajir. Special invitees to this dedication were Hands of the Cause Mr. William Sears, Mr. Collis Featherstone, Mrs. Iran Muhajir and her daughter Miss Gisu Muhajir, members of the National Spiritual Assembly, members of the Temple construction team and their spouses.

Following the dedication of the Muhajir Gate was a brief felicitation ceremony in the library. Rúhiyyih Khánum praised Mr. Sahba for his monumental work and presented him with a golden shield on behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly. She also made presentations to Mr. Soli Sorabjee, ex-Attorney General of India, and Mr. Jehangir Gagrat of the reputed firm of Bombay solicitors, M/s Gagrat & Co. for their voluntary legal advice and efforts in securing re-possession of the Temple estate appropriated by the government.

It's Finished!

As happens in every major project, finishing touches are given until the very last moment. So it happened with us on the night of 23rd December, the eve of Temple dedication. Everyone had their final odd works to complete in different parts of the building. Mr. Sahba and I were busy in the prayer hall checking the seating arangements, and so engrossed in our work, that we were unaware of other activities around us. Suddenly the auditorium was filled with an angelic chant. I turned around in surprise. Unnoticed by us, the hundred strong Persian choir had assembled for a final rehearsal. I rushed towards Mr. Sahba, threw my arms around him, sobbing, mumbled: *"It's finished, it's finished. Our Project is complete. Our Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is a reality."* With tears streaming down my face I hugged and kissed him. We both stood entranced, listening to the Words of God, melodiously rendered for the very first time in our Mashriqu'l-Adhkár . Our work was well and truly finished!

Festivals

Celebrating festivals at the Temple presented unique opportunities. The first festival we celebrated was Naw-Ruz, the Bahá'í New Year on 21st March 1987, followed by Ridvan on 21st April and then the birth anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh on 12th November. Early each morning we drove the twenty kilometers to the wholesale flower market in Old Delhi and bought some fifty kilograms of fresh marigold flowers. A group of youth threaded the flowers into kilometers of strings of marigold, while another group laid them out in designated patterns. While strings of marigold adorned the Muhajir Gate, the half-kilometer walkways were edged in orange, leading up the steps on to the podium. In the prayer hall, strings of marigold stretched along the periphery of the building and round the arch bases. The decorations created a festive atmosphere that generated queries from visitors about the celebrations, and opportunities to describe Bahá'í festivals.

Ayyam-i-Ha was celebrated with feasting. During the period, on a Monday when the Temple was closed to the public, all staff of over fifty members and invitees were treated to a grand lunch prepared by friends. Lunch was served on the lawns amid fun and laughter. A grand spirit of comaraderie prevailed.

Swords & Ploughshares

Desirous of presenting a gift to their Indian counterparts on the occasion of the dedication of their Mother Temple, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í s of New Zealand commissioned a native New Zealander, a Maori master craftsman, Mr. Walter Hetaraka, to design an appropriate traditional offering. Not being a Bahá'í, Mr. Hetaraka needed to know something about the Bahá'í Faith and their Temple in India, before he could design a suitable gift. From the books provided to him, he gleaned that Bahá'ís believed religion was one, revealed progressively through Manifestations of God in different ages; that the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh , was the Manifestation of God for this age, and more importantly, that He was the Promised One of all Holy Scriptures. To Mr.

Hetaraka that meant Bahá'u'lláh claimed to be Christ returned in the Glory of the Father. The master craftsman found that intriguing, and chose to investigate the claim against Bible prophecies. Laboriously he studied all prophecies, in the Old and New Testaments, and applied the criteria to the claims and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. He discovered all the conditions and proofs were fulfilled and evident. So as a devout Christian he recognized and accepted God's new Revelation, as also did his wife.

One of the blessings the new Revelation was destined to bestow upon mankind was universal peace. And if peace prevailed on the planet, weapons of war would be rendered redundant. Or, as was recorded in the Holy Bible, swords would be converted into ploughshares. Profoundly impressed, Mr. Hetaraka determined this concept in some form would make the ideal gift to an institution like the Bahá'í House of Worship, dedicated to the promotion of the unity of mankind, the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. The concept was approved by the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, and the Master Craftsman set about translating his vision into reality.
Mr. Hetaraka studied the form of a traditional Maori weapon, and devised to shape it into a plough. He carved out the offensive weapon of destruction, and deftly remodelled it into an implement of peaceful, life-sustaining work, a plough. The Maori gift ready, it's presentation had to conform with Maori tradition. Borne by a tribal elder, the gift had to be presented in person, to the accompaniment of specific Maori rituals and chants.

The precious gift arrived on Indian shores, borne by Aunty George Wainu, in the company of the Master Carver himself and his wife. On the appointed day, 26th November 1987, Temple staff and invitees, including Mr. Waters, Deputy High Commissioner for New Zealand, gathered in the library. The Tribal Elder and Master Carver, attired in Maori garb, bearing the gift proceeded towards the library. They stopped at the entrance. A Maori voice announced their arrival at the door. A voice from inside hailed the visitors in Maori language, and bade them welcome. The hall resounded with applause as Aunty George Wainu, robed in her tribal regalia and kiwi robe, made a regal entry, followed by Walter, bearing aloft the gift. Mrs. Hetaraka brought up the rear. They proceeded in silent dignity and stood behind the special stand upon which the sword-plough would eventually rest. Mr. Hetaraka stepped forward, holding the sword-plough in his extended arms, loudly uttering a Maori chant. If the language was not understood, Walter's graceful movements and gesticulations said it all. He wielded the implement first as a Maori warrior would wield a sword, with a fierce grimace, threatening death and destruction. His movements gradually became less warlike, slowed down, as did the manner of his wielding the implement. The expressions of ferocity gave way to smiling calm, as the implement transformed for productive use as a plough. The sword-to-ploughshare transformation complete, Aunty George Wainu stepped beside Walter, and together they placed, almost reverently, the gift on its stand. Mrs. Zena Sorbjee, Chairman of the Temple Management Committee, wreathed in smiles as everyone was, stepped between Walter and Aunty George Wainu, and received the gift on behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India. Handshakes were followed by

Maori style nose-rubbing, as Temple staff and Bahá'ís were introduced to the gift-bearing visitors, and to the Deputy High Commissioner. Mr. Waters conveyed the good wishes of the Chief Commissioner, Sir Edmund Hillary, who was out of station.

The function concluded with a surprise item - a lively Maori song presented by Mr. Waters and his family. The evening's experience was spiritually charged and hitherto, the most moving and stirring event at the Temple. That 26th November, coinciding with the Day of the Covenant, will be long remembered. But the grand finale was at our home. After a sumptuous dinner with our dear Maori guests, as they prepared to leave, dear Aunty George sprang a huge surprise on us. As she stood before us – my wife Ruhi and me – she unwrapped the traditional kiwi robe she wore, put it over our shoulders, and dubbed us as elder members of her clan! With flowing tears we embraced our beloved Maori guests, rubbed noses and wished them *Kia Ora* – good bye and farewell.

Tashi Delek

The Temple dedication ceremony was attended by a host of dignitaries, among them religious leaders representing many communities, but the first head of any religion to grace the Temple was His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama. The most suitable day for the visit was a Monday, when the Temple was closed to the public and admission to the function could be restricted to invitees and tight security assured. Accordingly 14th Nov. 1988 was suggested and confirmed by the office of the Dalai Lama.

Desirous of extending to the Dalai Lama a welcome befitting his station, enquiries were made at the Tibetan Cultural Centre on the appropriate manner of according the Buddhist leader a respectful reception. We were told the traditional Tibetan way was ritualistic and complicated, best performed by Buddhist monks. The simple and accepted way was to greet the Dalai Lama upon arrival with the Tibetan greeting "*Tashi Delek*" and to present him with a white scarf, cotton or silk. That was the simple and dignified manner in which we decided to receive the Dalai Lama.

As the motorcade neared, the Muhajir Gate swung open. The pilot car was signalled through, and the car bearing the Dalai Lama followed. It was my privilege to receive him at the head of the walkway. As he emerged from the car I greeted him with "tashi delek". As he turned, in pleasant surprise, his face wreathed in a radiant smile, I stepped forward and placed a white silk scarf about his neck. He graciously acknowledged the gift, and made a surprise move. He removed the scarf and placed it round my shoulders. His retinue of monks were also welcomed, and ushered towards the Temple. Proceeding along the walkway, the design concept and main features of the building were explained to His Holiness. As he listened, his eyes, glued to the building, wore a faraway look. Did the magnificence of the Temple remind him of the grand Potala Palace he had left behind in Lhasa?

Waiting at the building entrance to welcome the Dalai Lama was the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly, Mr. Shah and other Bahá'ís. He

acknowledged their greetings, and was led up the steps to the prayer hall. As he entered, all assembled invitees stood up, their hands folded in a silent *namaskar* greeting. All remained standing until the honoured guest seated himself on the special platform arranged for him. He sat cross-legged, facing the audience, and looked over the interior of the prayer hall. The arrival of the Temple choir signalled the commencement of the prayer service. As prayers were chanted the Dalai Lama sat motionless, his eyes closed, in deep meditation. He remained that way for some minutes after the last prayer. During those pregnant moments of complete silence, his soft resonant voice rang out in a brief Buddhist prayer. As he arose, so did the entire audience.

Exiting from the prayer hall, the Dalai Lama was escorted to the library. He evinced keen interest in the volumes and books on all religions, including Buddhism, and viewed the photographs of other Bahá'í Houses of Worship. He expressed his appreciation of the lotus concept of the building design and it's magnificence. He was completely at ease, very amiable and pleasant, reciprocating the greetings of those who made bold to meet him, and to be photographed with him. The Dalai Lama stole all hearts with his smiling meekness, and left us with precious memories to cherish.

First Head of State

The first Head of State to visit the Temple was the President of Sri Lanka, Mr. Jayawardane. He was received and welcomed at the head of the walkway as he emerged from his car, and with his entourage of diplomats and officials from the Sri Lankan embassy, was guided towards the Temple building. He evinced keen interest in the features of the building, especially in the symbolism of the lotus design. He attended a prayer service, and later spent time in the library, perusing Bahá'í literature in Tamil.

Prominent Bahá'í visitors

Among prominent Bahá'í visitors, before and after dedication, were Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum accompanied by Mrs. Violette Nakhjavani, Hands of the Cause Mr. William Sears and Mr. Collis Featherstone, members of the Universal House of Justice – Mr. David Ruhe, Mr. Ali Nakhjavani, Mr. Hooshmand Fatheazam, Mr. David Hofman, Mr. Douglas Martin and Mr. Peter Khan, Counsellors Mr. Khamsi and Mr. Ayman, popular American jazz trumpeteer Dizzy Gillespie, Austrian violinist Mr. Bijan Khadem-Missagh, choir conductor Mr. Tom Price, and many others.

Roses

Mr. David Hoffman visited the Temple after retiring from the Universal House of Justice. He was happy to be shown around the building, evinced keen interest and asked many questions about the structure, construction procedures, on-going maintenance, etc. After a cup of tea in the office, I mentioned that I had to attend to some urgent work in the gardens and asked if he would please excuse me or like to join me. Without hesitation he offered to come, explaining that it had been his responsibility in the Holy Land to take care of the lawns each summer. We walked to the rose beds at the head of the walkway, where the garden supervisor and three Bahá'ís awaited him. To his pleasant surprise Mr. Hoffman was invited to plant three rose plants to honour the memory of Dr. Lotfullah Hakim, Mr. Amos

Gibson and Mr. Charles Walcott, three colleagues on the Universal House of Justice who had passed away. Visibly overcome, he embraced each one of us and expressed his deep appreciation. Naming each of his colleagues in turn, he placed the rose plants in the readied pits, compacted them with earth, and watered them.

Rúhiyyih Khánum's vision of the Temple

Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum had great love for India. She admired everything Indian, their rich culture and curious traditions, the noble hearted people, their beautiful saree which she wore with grace and dignity. She appreciated Indian arts, crafts and even cuisine. No effort was too great, nor did any inconvenience deter her from travelling deep into rural India, to mingle with and understand the lives of villagers and study their ethnic diversity. Between 1962 and 1987 Rúhiyyih Khánum visited India several times. In October 1977 she represented the Universal House of Justice at the Asian Women's Conference and laid the foundation stone of the Temple. She visited Delhi twice during the construction period in February 1984, and again in October 1984, on her return journey to the Holy Land from the inauguration of the Samoa Temple. It was always a bounty to receive Amatu'l-Bahá and be inspired by her talks.

During the Ocotber 1984 visit, a meeting was held at Temple site in memory of recent Iranian Bahá'í martyrs and Rúhiyyih Khánum addressed the participants saying: *"Friends, I am very happy that I can be here at this wonderful conference, and I think that we all were very very moved last night to go to the Temple with our little candles, remembering our beloved martyrs of Iran and their sufferings.*

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is more than a building. It is an Institution. We can use the example of a wheel. If you visualize a city as the wheel and in the middle you place the building of the Temple, then you begin to understand what this institution means. The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár becomes the hope of city life. Around the Temple eventually will come up a house for pilgrims, schools and universities, hospitals, old people's home and wonderful libraries. All these things will be gathered around the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, because this is part of the life of the Bahá'í community.

All Temples built in the name of Bahá'u'lláh have the most beautiful atmosphere. Even last night, I am sure, we all noted this spirit in this building, though it is not yet finished. Yet, where we were standing on the cement, with the iron girders all around us, we felt the spirit of the Temple.

*Yesterday when we called on the Prime Minister (*Mrs. Indira Gandhi*) I told her that I have come from opening the Bahá'í Temple in Samoa, and I would like to show you the picture of it. So I showed her the pictures of the Bahá'i Temples of America, Uganda, Germany, Australia, Panama, and the latest one in Samoa. Then I said "This is the one we are building in Delhi, and this is the most beautiful of all." She looked at it with surprise. She had never seen the picture of the Temple before and she said "Where is it being built?" We identified the location. So you see the Temple opened its doors to the*

Prime Minister yesterday.

This Temple is open to everybody. You know in the Temple we have no priests, we have no speeches. Everybody is welcome to take part in our services. We will read from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh , writings of the Bab, and read from the Bhagavad Gita, read the Holy Words of all other religions, and everybody will come and pray with us. There is nothing like this in the world."

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OH LOTUS

Oh lotus in the hearts!
Growing up from the soil of Mother India,
Drawing deep springs up from the depths of Asia,
Rising a mighty fountain of mystic power unseen,
Felt, almost heard, as it overflows
From petals clasped in prayer
To carry the voices of the singers praising God
To be scattered far and wide by the scattering angels
Armfuls of prayer they carry,
Like panniers of invisible flowers
Scattering the words of God
Scattering His glorious words.
Up to the snow clad Himalayas
Down to the lapping edge of the seas
A rain of perfume, a rain of blessing
It seeps into every crevice,
Showers every jungle
Spatters the desert's sands
Passes above every meadow
Blows into every cave!
The scattering angels
Rank on rank, file on file,
Deploying the promise
Of their Lord, the Almighty.

- Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum

FOREVER IN BLOOM

A new flower has blossomed in Asia
And everyone's coming to see
For its fragrance has perfumed the planet
Setting hearts and souls everywhere free
A symbol of hope for the future
A symbol of peace for mankind
In silence rejoicing and quietly voicing
Its praises of all things divine.

Forever in bloom, this heavenly flower
A lotus of love and life-giving power

Beseeching the dead to come forth from their tombs
And witness the wonder, forever in bloom.

So come and behold now the beauty
Give ear to the unspoken call
For the sweet songs of life everlasting
Are now being sung for us all
Let those who are deaf come and listen
Let all who are blind come and see
As man now commences to transcend his senses
And learns what it means to be free.

Forever in bloom, this heavenly flower
A lotus of love and life-giving power
Beseeching the dead to come forth from their tombs
And witness the wonder, forever in bloom.

Let none then be hindered from coming
For who could be sad and forlorn
Where God and mankind come together
And faith in the future is born
Let all then rejoice in the vision
For darkness is destined to cease
And mankind shall notice the sweet-scented lotus
Proclaiming the promise of peace.

Forever in bloom, this heavenly flower
A lotus of love and life-giving power
Beseeching the dead to come forth from their tombs
And witness the wonder, forever in bloom.

- Thomas Shoemaker

Akbar's Dream

Akbar, the sixteenth century Mogul emperor who ruled India, realized the need and importance of establishing harmony between the large and diverse religious communities in his realm. He visualized and indeed attempted to propagate *Deen-i-Ilahi*, literally "Religion of God", as a common religion for all. And to demonstrate his respect for other communities he married a Hindu lady and made her queen. As a visionary and seeker of peace, he is reported to have recounted his hopes and frustrations to his court counsellor and confidant, Abu'l Fazal. The emperor's dream is immortalized by Alfred Lord Tennyson famous poem – Akbar's Dream.

Well I dreamed, that stone by stone I rear'd a sacred fane,
A Temple, neither Pagod, Mosque nor Church,
But loftier, simpler, always open door'd to every breath from heaven,
And Truth and Peace, and Love and Justice, came and dwelt therein,
And then despairingly, I watched my son, and those that follow'd,
Loosen stone from stone, all my fair work.

And from the ruins arose the shriek and curse of trampled millions
Even as in the time before;
But while I groan'd, from out the sunset pour'd
An alien race who fitted stone to stone again,
And Truth, Peace, Love and Justice came and dwelt therein.

A sacred, open-doored fane now stands majestically at Bahapur, beckoning all mankind to savour God's love that permeates its sanctified precincts.

Lord Tennyson's poem is prophetic. In the words of Akbar, he foretells the darkening of spiritual horizons with the decline of religion and the desecration of places of worship, but predicts their restoration and reinvigoration of religious practice, with the erection of a "loftier, simpler, always open door'd fane" by people from the West. Bahá'ís, the builders of the Lotus Temple, came originally from Iran, a country west of India. Also as expressed, the Lotus Temple is the harbinger of "Truth, Peace, Love and Justice." What Akbar did not foretell was that his "open door'd fane" would be located in Bahapur, an ancient township of the sultanate of Delhi. Bahapur, literally the abode of Baha, has become the footstool of God on earth.

Site Organisation

Two teams worked at site, not as opponents and competitors, not as disputing contractors and fault-finding clients, but as earnest and honest collaborators in the prosecution of a sacred mission, the teams of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í s of India as Client, and of M/s Engineering Construction Corporation Ltd. as Contractor.

Client's team:

1. Mr. Fariburz Sahba, designer-architect, mandated by the Universal House of Justice to manage the project. A tireless, inspiring team-leader and able administrator.
2. Mr Mashiyat Ashraf, Associate Architect, and member of the designing team in London. Joined construction team in Delhi in 1982; responsible for most of the detailing and micro-designing, including the magnificent Muhajir Gate, and symbol of the Greatest Name
3. Dr. N. R. Flint of M/s Flint & Neill Partnership, reputed structural engineers of England. During 1980-82 Dr. Flint was represented at site by Mr. Mahendra Raj, of M/s Mahendra Raj Consultants Pvt. Ltd., reputed structural engineers of Delhi. During 1982-83 resident engineer Mr. Victor Watson supervised the construction on behalf of Dr. Flint. Dr. Flint himself made periodic visits to Delhi to inspect the works.
4. Mr. Izzat Husaini from Iran and Mr. Lim Woon Hun from Malaysia, tireless junior architects and vigilant supervisors who ensured adherence to every architectural detail.
5. Mr. Kamal Fozdar, Mr. Fani, Mr. Fanaian, civil engineers, who, with their architect comrades, comprised the formidable team of supervisors. Mr. Fozdar ushered in the age of computers at site. His computer print-outs accurately described every area of the complex superstructure, which could otherwise not be visualised for devising costruction

procedures. The computer also aided accurate computation of measurements and quantities of elements of the curvatured superstructure.

6. Mr. Thakral, Quantity Surveyor.
7. Mr. Hasan Saberi, all-round handyman, who completed the plumbing works abandoned by a sub-contractor, and was a great help in Tempe building maintenance. He, with Mrs Saberi lived in and devotedly served the Temple as care-takers until 2002.
8. Mr. Manuchehr Rahimian, Mr. Charles Macdonald, Mr. Nader Choupanian, and Mr. Shahram Pourshafie strengthened the supervisory cadre for brief periods.
9. Mr. Ruhullah Bahram, receptionist and tourist guide to the hordes of enquirers that streamed to the site daily.
10. Mrs. Sabharwal, untiring office secretary whose day ended not by the clock, but when her work was completed.
11. Miss Soroor Rameshfar, Miss Shahnaz Dabestani and Mr. Susheelan, volunteers who fulfilled secretarial responsibilities at Bahá'í House in the early days of the Project.
12. Mr. N.K.Budhiraja, accountant and book-keeper.
13. Mr. Tuki Singh Bhatti, office-peon, who ran errands, xeroxed documents, magically served tea at the call of a bell, a Man- Friday without whom the office could not function. The first employee of the Project, who served the Temple until 2011.
14. Mr. Sheriar Nooreyezdan - representative of the National Spiritual Assembly; responsible for correspondence, fund-raising and finances, materials procurement and imports, legal and labour matters, dealing with government and statutory authorities.

Contractor's team:

1. Mr. Agarwal, Project Manager; could not assume charge due to delayed take-over of his former project. Mr. Ganapathy Tilak, 1980-81, assumed charge in place of Mr. Agarwal.
2. Mr. Balasubramaniam, Construction Manager 1981-82; promoted in place of Mr. Tilak.
   Mr. M. A. Radhakrishnan, 1982-83, promoted upon transfer of Mr. Balasubramaniam.
   Mr. J. Ganguly, assumed charge with new site team in January1984 and completed the Project in December 1986.
3. Mr. Alva and Mr. Narsimha Rao, Planning Engineers
4. Mr. Dhawan, Senior Civil Engineer, in charge of survey and lay-out of buildings, and subsequently, of supervising main building construction. Resigned in November 1981.
5. Mr. Bajaj, senior Civil Engineer, joined in 1981, supervised main building construction until June 1983.

6. Mr. Bhaskar Raju, senior Civil Engineer, joined in January 1984, visualized, sequenced and supervised main building construction through to completion.
7. Mr.Daljit Singh, senior Civil Engineer, responsible for ancillary building construction.
8. Mr.Jayaraman, Civil Engineer, responsible for first mock-up study of the arch junction, and intricate geometry of shell structure. Resigned in June 1981.
9. Mr.Malhotra, Civil Engineer, responsible for lay-out and construction of temporary facilities during mobilisation period.
Junior Civil Engineers: Trainee-engineers, too many to name, given site supervision duties for short periods.
10. Mr.Menon, quality control engineer and concrete technologist of vast experience, responsible
for myriad tests and experiments, produced appropriate concrete mix-designs and finishes.
11. Mr. Amrik Singh, Carpentry Foreman resigned in December 1980.
12. Mr. Shivram Singh, Carpentry Foreman, conceived the shell shuttering designs, and supervised fabrication and installation to its true geometry.
13. Mr. Chandrashekhar, indefatigable Concreting Foreman.
14. Mr. Walter, Administrative Officer 1980-83.
15. Mr. Mohan, Administrative Officer 1984-86.
16. Mr. Das, materials Procurement Officer 1984-86.

Special mention needs be made of senior ECC executives Mr. A. Ramakrishna, Mr. S.S. Naharoy, Mr. J. L. Menezes, who took keen interest in the Project and made frequent visits from ECC Madras Head Office. Moreover, completion of the project could not be imagined without the total administrative backing and personal involvement of ECC Chairman and Managing Director, Mr. Ramachandran.

Until June 1983 the Contractor's team worked under their Regional Office, headed by Mr. G. B. Singh. Upon resumption of work in January 1984 they worked directly under their Head Office, reporting to General Manager Mr. S. S. Naharoy. The keen interest shown by Mr. Holck-Larsen, Managing Director of ECC parent company – Larsen & Toubro Ltd., and his frequent site visits was a source of encouragement to all.

Consultants:
Mr. Mahendra Raj – eminent consultant structural engineer, who represented Dr. Flint and supervised construction 1980-82.

Mr. Deolalikar – reputed consultant plumbing and sanitary engineer, designer of the plumbing and sanitary systems, and filtration plants for pools.

Mr. S. N. Mathur – eminent electrical consultant, designer of the electrical works and systems. Regretfully he passed away before completion of construction.

Mr. Jasbir Sawhney – adviser as senior architect.

Notable among professionals and institutions who extended valuable support were:
Dr. Choudhary of Torsteel Foundation, Indian Institute of Technology, who carried out special tests on materials.

Concrete Research Institute and Indian Institute of Science, Madras. Computers were a rarity in those days in India, and their use for construction purposes unprecedented. IIT Madras provided the essential details that ensured accuracy of the geometry of the main building, a crucial factor contributing to the elegance and magnificence of the building.

Count Paolo Marzotto of Industria Marmi Vincentini, Italy, for their keen interest and diligence in designing and supplying the marble panels that lends beauty and elegance to the building.

A special debt of gratitude is owed to Mr. Jehangir Gagrat, Head of the reputed Bombay Solicitors firm of M/s Gagrat & Co., and Mr. Soli Sorabjee, Senior Advocate of the Supreme Court of India and ex-Attorney General of India for their advice in successfully seeing the National Spiritual Assembly through the tortuous legal proceedings of regaining possession of the Temple land after its acquisition by the Government.

To all who laboured and assisted in the raising of the now world-renowned Lotus Temple, the Bahá'í community owes a debt of gratitude. To the Hidden Hand that made the iconic Temple construction possible, we bow our heads in submission and humble tribute.

Notable Comments

Beautiful concrete structures have always been built, as amply demonstrated by two examples – the Pantheon in Rome and the Lotus Temple in New Delhi – between which constructions there is a whole two thousand year gap... It is hoped that future generations will contemplate the recently completed beautiful Lotus Temple in New Delhi with the same admiration and respect, appreciating that in our technological era the sense of beauty and harmony has not been totally lost.
Dr. Rene Walter, Professor, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Lausanne, during lecture at IABSE Symposium "Concrete Structure for the Year 2000", Versailles, France, September 1987.

The Bahá'í Temple in New Delhi - This Institution Gold Medal winner from Flint & Neill Partnership must be one of the most elegant buildings of the last half century. It demonstrates most clearly the elegance resulting from a sympathetic relationship between the engineer, the architect, and the client. There is no doubt as to the continuous professional application and patience required to achieve this quality of building.

J. H. Armstrong, quoted in "Structural Engineer" - Journal of the Institution of Structural Engineers of U.K. November 1989

This building must be among the most remarkable conceptions of our time. I cannot think of another like it – clearly symbolic, sculptural – yet impressively accommodating and heroically structural. Truly inspiring in form, pattern and material. It is powerfully appealing.

John Bland, Head, School of Architecture, McGill University, Sept.1991

The Bahá'í Temple will probably be recognized in years to come as one of the building masterpieces of the 20th century.
Construction News, London, April 1986.

The Bahá'í Temple in New Delhi is probably one of the most outstanding contemporary structures in the world. The complexity of its structure, and the very high standards of workmanship expected to be achieved, demand a dynamic construction management with a high degree of innovativeness, team spirit, and quality consciousness.
Asian Architect and Contractor (Hong Kong) February 1987

The building is remarkable, not only for its form and grace, but also because it is a shining example of the culmination of computer technology, human craftsmanship, and more than a little inspiration. The building represents a striking marriage of architecture and engineering.
Concrete Quarterly, Cement and Concrete Association, U. K. Jan.-Mar. 1987

The building of this Temple in India, with its limited technology, is a major achievement. Not only has a large and poured-in-place concrete structure been built on a scale never attempted before, but it has been done with loving care and meticulous attention to detail.
Architecture U.S.A. September 1987

A powerful icon of great beauty that goes beyond its pure function of serving as a congregation space to become an important architectural symbol of the city.
World Architecture 1900-2000: A Critical Mosaic, Volume 8, South Asia.

Not without justification, the eminent German engineer, Dr. Fritz Leonardt, has described the New Delhi Temple as the Taj Mahal of the 20th century. The Bahá'í Temple will probably be recognised in years to come as one of the building masterpieces of the 20th century. Construction News, London, April 1986

This construction will set standards for the next century.
Mr. James R. Reiney, Manager, Bechtel Construction Inc., USA.

It is heartening to see the product of such dedication, inspiration and skill as this emerging Temple. Such a building is an act of faith.
Mr. Joseph Allen Stein, Senior Architect, Delhi.

The Mother Temple of the Bahá'í Faith symbolises many concepts, from the spiritual and religious to art, architecture and engineering. It is a monument, not

only in the sense of being an outstanding landmark embellishing Delhi ... but it is also a monument of tribute to human skills and craftsmanship.... It is one of the finest examples of science and engineering triumphing in precisely moulding a beautiful and complex artistic form.
Mr. C. R. Ramakrishnan, Vice President (Operations), Larsen & Toubro Ltd.

An architectural marvel that will add to the glory of the already rich Indian architecture.
Mr. M. Ramaswamy Iyer, Chief Architect, Government of Kerala.

Perfection in construction and design seen again after Taj Mahal.
Mr. N. N. Kulkarni, Chief Architect, N.P.B. Atomic Energy, Bombay.

We are very much impressed by the Project, including the design, engineering and construction skills and technology. We are happy that we could see one of the wonders of the civil engineering world.
Prof. Stoimir Chervenkov, Higher Institute of Civil Engineering, Sofia, Bulgaria.

Highest pinnacle of aesthetic excellence of architecture and spirituality.
Mr. J. G. Bodhe, Past President of the Institute of Engineers, and Vice President of Federation of
Indian Engineers, Bombay.

A fantastic structure which could be designed and evolved and constructed by devotion and faith. Something to be seen to be believed."
Mr. R. Guhar, Chief Engineer, Public Works Dept., Govt. of Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal.

A unique structure anywhere in the world. Well planned, well designed, and exquisitely built. A gift to posterity.
Mr. P. P. Dharwadkar, Chief Consultant PESA, New Delhi.

One of the remarkable achievements of our time, proving that the drive and vision of the spirit can truly achieve miracles.
Arthur Ericson, Architect, USA

Truly the most magnificent building I have seen in my life. From creation to realization, a work of great inspiration.
Mr. James McHinley, Minister-Counsellor for Public Affairs, American Embassy, Delhi.

After one year, a new visit, a remarkable progress to one of the world's greatest architectural adventures.
Mr. H. Holck-Larsen, Chairman and Managing Director of Larsen & Toubro Ltd. Bombay.

A fascinating architectural and engineering marvel. After centuries India once again has a beautiful landmark, aspiring for the need of the hour – communal harmony, peace and prosperity of mankind.

Mr. K. K. Bandyopadhyay, Director (Buildings), Delhi Development Authority.

We are moved by this noble venture and the Faith behind it.
Mr. P. K. Bandyopadhyay, Secretary-General, Asia-Pacific News Agencies.

The Temple complex is a tear-drop on the face of troubled humanity. It is hoped it's radiance will serve the purpose for which it was conceived.
Mr. Gautam Kaul, Additional Commissioner of Police, Delhi.24.5.85

Visit to this Temple of faith and service to humanity, even in it's construction stage, is a rare privilege and a pilgrimage. To what heights the visitor would be transported once it is complete cannot perhaps be described in words.
Mr. P. P Shrivastav, Commissioner, Municipal Corporation of Delhi.

If there is peace on earth, it is here.
Mr. Nana Chudasama, Sheriff of Bombay.

I have read a poem in marble today.
Baba Amte, renowned and dedicated Social Worker, Anandvan, Warora, Maharashtra.

A design inspired by God and reflecting the sophistication and potentialities of a scientific age, destined to glorify God.
Mr. Douglas W. Allen, Norfolk, Virginia, USA.

I am so deeply moved, visiting this great beautiful place, that I find no words to express my felings! I am sure that when it is completed, people visiting here will find intense joy, love and peace.
Pandit Ravi Shankar – Sitarist.

We are very pleased to have a chance to visit this Bahá'í House of Worship. This is the most impressive and beautiful marble building I've ever seen."
Madam Pan Yifang, wife of Chinese Ambassador to India.

Breath taking! Aesthetically the most beautiful structure we have seen in our country. The attention to detail is incredible.
Roshan and Bal Mundkar, Bombay.

This is a unique type of architecture which explains to what heights human imagination can reach.
Mr. S. Shankar Rao – Ex-Education Minister, Karnataka Govt.

From this lotus will grow a new India.
Mrs. Mildred Mottahedeh, USA.

Here is love and devotion crystallized in stone. This magnificent edifice is a befitting tribute to the people of India, whose never-ending quest for spiritual advancement has inspired so many generations. May the fragrance of love and unity emanating from this heavenly Lotus of

Bahapur perfume the hearts and souls of diverse people and bind them together in praise of their Creator."
Mr. Hushmand Fatheazam, member of Bahá'í Universal House of Justice, Haifa, Israel.

There is no question that this is the signal feat of the decade for the Faith, and the symbol of the Cause throughout Asia. The spirit of the Bahá'í Faith is already strong in the unfinished edifice – how much more so when the Holy Word rises in chant and song within the place of the Mention of God. We are thrilled and elated.
Dr. David Ruhe, member of Bahá'í Universal House of Justice, and Mrs. Margaret Ruhe

I consider this visit an act of pilgrimage. It has the same effect of spiritual uplifting.
Mr. Iraj Ayman

An absolute wonder.
Mr. Shyamla Pappu, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India, New Delhi

CONTINENTAL BAHÁ'Í HOUSES OF WORSHIP (color pics. + brief captions)

1.ASIA: Ashkabad – Russian Turkestan; 1902 – 1908; designed and built by Ustad Ali Akbar Banna; Comprised prayer hall, community centre, school, etc. ; expropriated by Russian Communist Government in 1928; damaged in severe earthquake in 1948; demolished in 1963.

2.NORTH AMERICA: Wilmette – 100 Linden Avenue, Illinois; Architect Louis Bourgeois; Corner stone laid by Abdu'l-Bahá in 1912; completed in 1953; dedicated on 2nd. May 1953 by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum .

3. AUSTRALIA; Sydney, 173 Mona Vale, Sydney; Architect Mr. Charles Mason Remey; dedicated 17th Sept 1961 by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum .

4. EAST AFRICA: Kampala; Kikaya Hill, Kampala, Uganda; Architect Charles Mason Remey; Foundation Stone laid by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum in Jan. 1958; dedicated by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum in 1962.

5. EUROPE: Frankfurt, Langenhein, Taunus; Architect Disyur Tento Rocholl; dedicated by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum on 4th July 1964

6. CENTRAL AMERICA: Panama; Architect Peter Tillotson; started in 1967; dedicated by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum on 29th April 1972

7. SOUTH PACIFICc– Apia, Samoa; Architect Hossain Amanat; Corner Stone laid by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum in 1979; completed in 1984 and dedicatd by Malietoa Tanumafili II, King of Samoa, in presence of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum on 1st Sept 1984.

8. ASIAN SUB-CONTINENT: Delhi; Architect Fariburz Sahba; Associate Architect:Mashiyat Ashraf; foundation stone laid by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum on 17 October 1977; construction started Ridvan 1980; dedicated by Rúhiyyih Khánum on 24th Dec 1986; open to public 1st January 1987.

9.SOUTH AMERICA; Santiago, Chile; Architect Siamak Hariri; dedicated on 19 Oct.2016

Selected photos of construction and important visitors